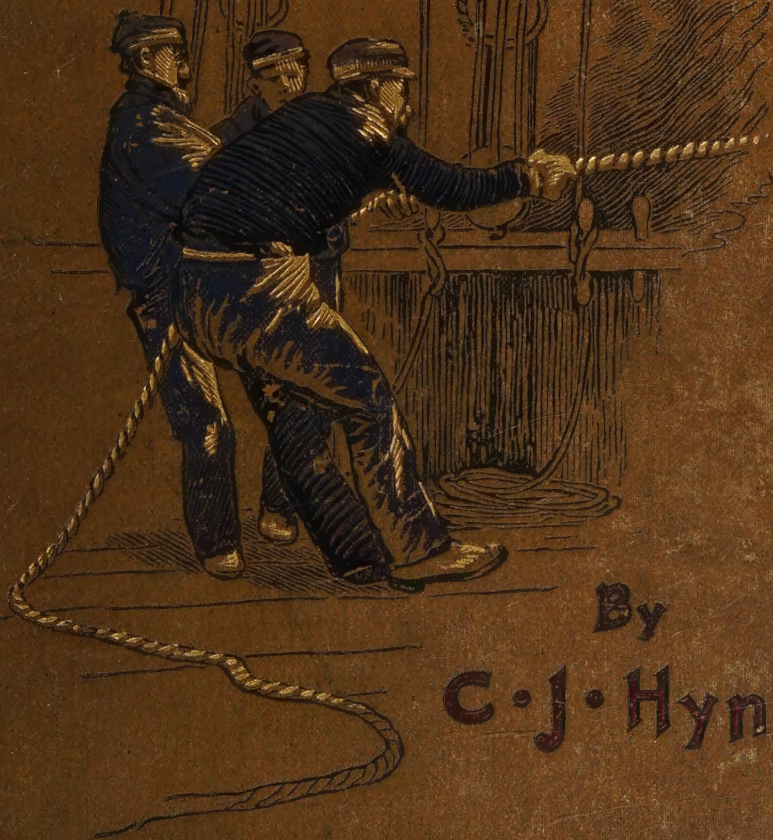


The Captured Cruiser.



By
C. J. Hyne.

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Lettie Burnett

Yon Dady. 1894

THE CAPTURED CRUISER.





THE CAPTURED CRUISER:

OR, TWO YEARS FROM LAND.

BY

C. J. HYNE,

Author of "Four Red Nightcaps;" "Stimson's Reef;"
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CONTENTS.

CHAP.	Page
I. A DAY'S TRAWLING,	9
II. ABOARD THE "B. JAMES BROCK,"	21
III. BLOWN TO SEA,	35
IV. WATER-LOGGED,	52
V. A DESPERATE SIGNAL,	63
VI. THE S.S. "LYNX,"	69
VII. THE BLOCKADE,	82
VIII. CHASED,	92
IX. A TORPEDO-BOAT,	104
X. CAPTURED,	115
XI. UNDER HATCHES,	123
XII. THE HULK,	129
XIII. SCHEMINGS,	136
XIV. BOARDING THE "DODREDA,"	148
XV. STUCK ON A SHOAL,	160
XVI. IN THE LINE OF FIRE,	172
XVII. AWAY TO SEA,	187
XVIII. CLEARING FOR ACTION,	200
XIX. TORPEDO-BOATS AGAIN,	209
XX. THE TIDINGS OF AMOS POWER,	221

CHAP.	Page
XXI. TRACKLESS OCEAN-WAYS,	232
XXII. CAPE HORN,	236
XXIII. STRANDED,	242
XXIV. THE GREAT BERG,	251
XXV. AFLOAT ONCE MORE,	261
XXVI. SHE'S SINKING!	270
XXVII. THE "ISAAC AND AILEEN,"	277

ILLUSTRATIONS.

	Page
THE LAST OF THE "DODREDA,"	<i>Frontis.</i> 276
GETTING THE "SHEILA" AFLOAT,	13
BATHURST STEERS THE "B. JAMES BROCK" BEFORE THE GALE, 44	
THE HULK DRIFTS DOWN ON THE CRUISER,	160
A PRISONER OF WAR,	200
"BARQUE AHoy! WHAT BARQUE'S THAT?"	228



THE CAPTURED CRUISER:

OR, TWO YEARS FROM LAND

CHAPTER I.

A DAY'S TRAWLING.



WALTER BATHURST lived over at Tring, which is the next village to Potter's Cove, inland. His father was Squire of Tring, and my father occupied a similar position at the fishing village. Walter had just left Eton. He was eighteen, and as he had rowed "six" in their boat at Henley, which simply walked for the Ladies' Plate that year, you can guess that he was fairly strong. He was sparish in build then, and about a fathom long, and he was inordinately proud of a black down that was just beginning to darken his upper lip.

I was at Harrow, and had recently had the pleasure of helping to gain a victory over some of Bathurst's schoolfellows on Lord's cricket-ground. That is some sort of a certificate of strength and activity, and so

my modesty is spared the task of a further personal description.

We were both going up to Cambridge in the ensuing October, and having already been franked through matriculation, there was no immediate necessity—so we thought—for further work at present. Our respective parents, it is true, with admirable foresight, suggested that this was an extremely good time to read for the Little-go; and they were even thoughtful enough to provide us with several annotated text-books of classical authors, standard works on mathematics, and copies of the ingenious Evidences of the late Dr. Paley. But both Walter and I, with a regard for personal health which was absolutely new to us, decided that we were both suffering acutely from excessive mental exertion.

The fact was not apparent to the naked eye. Indeed, my father was pleased to remark that the pair of us were blessed with the thews and constitutions of Damascus donkeys. We naturally thought our own diagnoses were the more accurate. But we were in no wise bigoted. We admitted that my father might be right. And so to test the case, we adopted our own method of treatment, which was simply to abstain from the perusal of all learned works whatever until the Cambridge term began. If under this course our overworked mental condition did not improve, why, then we would honestly own my father to be right. If, on the other hand, we felt refreshed—and surely

the subject is always the best judge of the result of treatment—why, then our view of the symptoms had been right. And in the meanwhile the trial would not be unendurable to us.

So we spent that vacation partly at Tring, partly at Potter's Cove, enjoying the time according to the best of our ability. Other society besides our own there was none we cared about within reasonable distance; and so we were thrown entirely upon our own resources; but we were never dull, and never hard-up for occupation.

I think, though, on the whole, trawling was our chief amusement. We had dabbled in it before, and had liked it so much that this summer we had managed to get a small open boat of our own. She was not a remarkably valuable craft. In fact, I am within the truth when I describe her as a rotten old tub. But the supply of cash at our disposal prevented our getting a better, and so it was the *Sheila* or nothing. We did not despise her, though, in the very least. On the contrary, we were excessively proud of her, as people who love the sea generally are of the first craft in which they can claim proprietorship. As far as amateur carpentry could do it, we had renovated her thoroughly, and her two sprit-sails and jib—the outcome of local needles—left nothing to be desired. But the fact remained that her bottom planking was extremely—shall I say?—spongy; and this trifling defect gave rise to some rather gloomy prophecy amongst the

fisher-folk. But their forebodings never disturbed us. They went out in much worse boats than the *Sheila*; and what was good enough for married men with families, was surely good enough for us.

And so we scraped the Turtleback Bank with our little trawl irons, and despised all their cautions.

Now it had occurred to us that we might turn our fishing to profitable account. The kitchens of our respective homes consumed but a limited supply of our takings, so that the balance of the catch was given away to anyone who would deign to take it, and as often as not received as though the favour was on the side of the recipient. For in a fishing village fish is usually a drug in the kettle. So we made a bargain with a dealer in the town, which was not very far away, who willingly agreed to take the surplus off our hands at market price; and we had keen hopes that by adding some of those well-earned sovereigns to our other funds, we might be able to purchase a certain 10-ton cutter for next season.

I must confess that this scheme was viewed with considerable amusement by our respective relatives; but probably thinking that we might be far worse employed, they never made any objection to it, being persuaded that we were quite able to look after ourselves, and in little danger of getting drowned.

So our fishing, though still enjoyed for the sake of the sport, was conducted also with a keen eye to the main chance. When you come to think of it, there is very



little difference between selling the superfluous product of the trawl-net and selling one's pheasants after a *battue*. The same man buys both.

But let me break into the yarn now, without any more explanations.

One afternoon—it was the last Monday in September—Walter suggested that we should go out to the Turtleback Bank again. We had been over it at daylight that morning, and had brought back a box and a half of soles and a box of mixed fish—a very good haul for us. He commented on this, said the day was evidently a favourable one, remarked that the tide had turned again, and said we should be fools to miss such an opportunity. I agreed with him, and off we set to the Cove. Had either of us been gifted with the power of prophetic insight into the future, I don't exactly think we should have gone fishing that day. But as we were both naturally ignorant of what was to befall, we tramped down the avenue, and then along the straggling village street cheerfully enough, and so down on to the beach.

The *Sheila* was lying high and dry on the sand, with the crown of the trawl-net hoisted to her main-mast head to dry. But in less than a quarter of an hour everything had been put ship-shape, and with the help of a couple of good-natured shore loafers we had run her down into the water.

Wind was off-shore and stiffish, so we ran down the little estuary under main-sail and jib alone, leaving the

I agreed with him thoroughly; but not feeling remarkably interested in Little-go subjects just then, did not follow the subject up. After leaning over to feel that the trawl-warp was drawing properly, I turned round, and once more bent my eyes upon the schooner.

She had come much nearer now, and in the smooth water under the lee of the land it was possible to examine her more closely than it had been when she was ducking over the heavier seas further out. She was a small vessel of some hundred and sixty or seventy tons, bluff-bowed and round-sterned. Her tiller came in through a port in the after-bulwarks, and was held by a man in a brown felt hat. There were a couple of other men in sight, lolling over the rail.

"Two other fellows below, probably," mused Bathurst. "Five of a crew altogether. That would be about her number. There must be somebody on board who's been here before. She's holding on confidently enough, and the entrance isn't an easy one."

"She'll be on the Calf Sand if she stands on much further as she's going," I remarked. "It's about half-flood now, and that's not enough for her draught. She'll be stuck as sure as gulls eat little fishes if—Hullo! That's 'Lee helm!' You're right, Walter. There is someone who knows the place. The pilot-book is all wrong, so they can't be taking her in with that."

The schooner came past us again close to leeward, going by pretty quickly, as our pace with the heavy

drag of the trawl was but slow. The three men on her deck looked casually at us as she surged past, and he of the stiff brown hat at the tiller hailed.

"Ahoy there! Channel same's 't used to be, is it? No sands shifted nor nothink?"

"Just as it always was since I can remember," Walter shouted back. "But," he added by way of warning, "the pilot-book's wrong."

"Ay, ay; I know that, thankee. Good luck to ye."

The schooner reached away from us, and as she went we could see the two men go forward and get their ground tackle ready; hoisting a rusty bay-palm anchor over the bulwarks, and stopping it there with a piece of line, and getting a score or so fathoms of reddened chain up on deck, and overhauling it round the windlass.

She made a longer board this time, and then coming about once more took a small swig at all her sheets, and stood directly in for the mouth of the Cove.

"She's about as close as they can get her," Bathurst remarked, "and she's sagging away to leeward a good bit, but she'll just about do it. I wonder who that chap was who was steering. He must know the place to an inch; and that's a thing that isn't learned in a day, nor yet in a month. But still I didn't recognize his face in the least."

"Nor I. And what's more, he didn't seem to know either of us. Maybe he left the place as a boy years ago, and hasn't been back since. That would account

for his knowledge of the Cove and his ignorance of us. But it is useless to speculate further. We can find out for certain to-morrow morning, if the schooner is still here."

"Oh, she'll be here sure enough. We're in for a big blow, if I know anything about local weather signs. It wouldn't be a bad idea to heave down another reef in our main-sail and give her the smaller jib. It's going to rain directly, and that'll mean more wind. This little tub's got about as much as she can do with now."

We reduced sail, and then as the weather began to look still more threatening, we proceeded to heave-to and fish our trawl. There was a good deal of warp out, and as the catch seemed a heavy one, this last operation was not done in a minute. But our hands were hard and our arms strong, and the three-inch warp came in fathom by fathom over the weather side, till the beam hove in sight and was secured in its place. The haul of fish was landed on board, and tumbled with scant ceremony on the bottom of the boat; and then getting weigh on her again, we started on a dead beat to windward, straight for the Cove.

Our progress was slow. We were too close under the lee of the land for much sea to get up, but the rain squalls were tearing down with biting force, and the heavy breeze of the afternoon had changed into a stiffish gale. With smaller canvas we should have done better; but the main-spritsail had but two rows

of reef-points, and our second jib was too large. Bathurst was steering, and to avoid letting her lose weigh in the squalls he had often to use a weather-helm that brought the water streaming green over the gunwale. But we were both used to trifles of that sort, and I bailed the sea back to its proper place as fast as it found its way on board.

The land was low-lying, and as we neared it the wind came down heavier than ever. Indeed, several times it needed the pair of us leaning well over to windward to keep the little craft from turning the turtle altogether. Had we possessed a pair of oars we should have dowsed sail and rowed her home; but we had only a single small paddle on board. The other had been broken the day before and not replaced, and with the one we should have been powerless to scull her against the gale. So there was nothing for it but to hold on as we were, though both of us had begun to wish heartily for the shore.

By dint of constant alertness on Walter's part and vigorous baling on mine we made the mouth of the Cove at last, but we still had a long way before us. The banks are of mud till one gets to the village, and it is utterly impossible to land on them, even if we wanted to do such a thing. Besides, we intended to berth our boat for the night in her old spot, and not leave her where she would be knocked to pieces if the wind changed. And so handling her as gingerly as we were able, we stood on tack and tack up the estuary, con-

scious of having made a little ground every time we put about. Twilight had come on, but that made little difference, for, knowing the place thoroughly, we were all right in that respect so long as the shores were not absolutely hidden in darkness.

We had passed the schooner, moored in mid-channel, and made all snug. Bathurst was just saying something about our being too late to send our fish by that night's train when another heavy squall struck us. We both leaned over the weather gunwale as far as we were able, and Walter luffed slightly to ease her. But the pressure was too great. With a crack the mast-step split in halves down the middle; and the mast, darting away to leeward, had ripped three of the rotten planks out with its heel before the steersman could shoot her nose up into the wind.

The wound was a ghastly one, and the water was pouring in in a clear green stream. With the inspiration of the moment I scrambled forward over the thwarts, and tried to put my back against the hole. But the worst place was under the mast thwart, where I couldn't get at it, and before thirty seconds were over the boat was three parts full. The rotten old fabric was torn almost to pieces. It was impossible to save her.

"Jump, Frank, before she pulls us down. It's too far to swim to shore against this wind. We'll make for the schooner, and get her people to put us on the beach in their punt,"

I slipped over into the water, shoes, coat, and all, and Walter was quickly in and swimming leisurely alongside of me. There was a gentle tide against us, but the schooner was to leeward, and we dropped down to her with very little exertion. She was riding at single anchor, head to wind, and had evidently a lot of cable out, for there were at least a couple of fathoms of the rusted links showing above the water, and stiff as a solid bar with the strain that was on them. Walter reached the chain first and scrambled on board. I followed, and found him looking at the fore-hatch.

“Why,” he said, “I believe her people are all ashore. Don’t you remember noticing as we passed, that there was no boat astern of her. And look, the chocks are empty on deck. Well, we shall have to wait till they come back, that’s all. However, we may as well make sure that there’s nobody below before we do anything further. It would be as well to report ourselves at once if possible. Our call is a somewhat unceremonious one.”

CHAPTER II.

ABOARD THE *B. JAMES BROCK.*

THE forecastle was entered through a companion which had folding doors and a sliding lid. We opened these and hailed. There was no response.

Amidships was the hatch to the hold. Aft the

mainmast was another companion, and beyond it again a small, square skylight, with a painted sailcloth cover and glass in the sides. Inside this was hung the compass and a swinging paraffin lamp—there being no regular binnacle. We peered through the glass, but could see nothing below.

“There is no one on board,” I observed. “Look, Walter, this hasp on these doors at the top of the companion could only have been fastened from outside.”

“And,” added Bathurst, “as it isn’t turning-out time at the Nelson’s Head till ten-thirty, we may consider ourselves booked till eleven at least, if not till later; so we may as well take things philosophically. Your people will think you are staying at Tring; my people will be happy with the idea that I am snugly at your place. So no one will be anxious about us; and, on the other hand, no one is likely to come out here and take us off. It was too dark when the *Sheila* collapsed for anyone to see what happened. We have got a long wait before us, but we may be thankful for being in no worse plight. If that accident had happened half an hour earlier you and I would have been drowned, Frank, as sure as there are stones in cherries.”

“I say, Walter, if we’ve at least three hours’ wait before us, can’t we contrive to get a bit of shelter somewhere? This east wind blowing on sodden clothes makes one feel a trifle chilly.”

“It would hardly do to go below,” observed Bathurst meditatively.

"Yes, that would be a trifle too free and easy, although I believe shipwrecked mariners, such as we may claim to be just now, are not bound down by the same rules of etiquette which guide and fetter other men; but under the bulwarks there, forrard, would do. She's riding head to wind. If we could contrive to crouch in somewhere there, we should get a bit of shelter."

"We can try," said Bathurst.

And so we tried; but the bulwarks flared outwards at the bow, and the keen breath of the gale and its burden of icy rain poured down on us remorselessly as ever, and coming in through the hawse-pipes, and whistling through the chinks beside the gammon iron, eddied and tore around us with remorseless fury.

"Marching up and down the deck is better than this," exclaimed my companion after enduring the situation for about five minutes, and then, as the thought suddenly struck him, he added, "Why, there's the galley! We can shelter under the lee of that."

The galley consisted of a green-painted wooden box, four feet by six by six, securely clasped to the deck by iron bands abaft the fore-mast. The fore-boom just cleared it, and the black iron funnel from the stove within was fitted with a movable top-joint so as to slant it away from the wind and prevent the smoke from being blown back whence it came. In fine weather half the after-wall of this small sea-kitchen would unship bodily, so that the cook could

have abundance of air and light; but at other times it was entered by a sliding panel, which was door and window both.

We noted these salient points pretty rapidly, and Bathurst discovered by experiment that the sliding panel was not fastened.

“Look here,” he shouted, after we had stood there a quarter of an hour listening to the gale booming around us, “it’s no use standing here shivering like a couple of overgrown Italian greyhounds, just for the sake of ceremony. We’ll just swallow our scruples and go inside.”

He slid open the door and passed in. I followed, and closed the panel after me. The place was warm, dark, and smelt of boiled cabbage. Moving about, my head hit upon something hard, swinging from a hook above. I put up my hand and felt that it was one of those tin arrangements with a large wick coming through a thick spout, which sailors call slush-lamps, and which landsmen would say looked uncommonly like a sort of coffee-pot. Mentioning this discovery aloud, Bathurst replied that he had found matches. After two or three trials—for he was streaming with wet—he managed to get a light, and we soon had the slush-lamp emitting a yellow, smoky, malodorous flame. It lit up the place, however, and showed us a rusty iron stove, a black iron frying-pan, ditto kettle, and ditto sauce-pan with loose handle. There were coals and wood in a bunker at one side, a narrow ledge of a table, and an

iron ladle hanging from a nail on one of the blackened walls. That was the whole *batterie de cuisine*, unless one can count a bench fixed to the side opposite the stove as part of the cook's apparatus.

"Look here," said Bathurst, "it's no use doing things by halves. We are in for a penny now, as we've broken into the galley, or caboose, or whatever they call it, so we may as well plunge and risk the pound by lighting the fire. I don't suppose the fellows will object when they come on board, and if they do, they can't do much more. Anyway, we'll hand them over the pound aforesaid to-morrow morning, and I daresay when they finger it they'll wish the supply of such profitable guests would continue. D'ye see any paper?"

"Not a scrap anywhere."

"Well, it can't be helped. Get out your knife, Frank, there's a good chap, and help me splinter up one or two of these pieces of wood."

"There, that's enough," he continued a minute after, when I had produced about a handful of splinters. "There's a draught blowing up this chimney hard enough to tear the teeth out of a tin soldier. I generally exhibit a great lack of dexterity when it falls to my lot to light a fire, but the most ignorant person in the world could hardly fail here. Hurrah! there it goes. Now for another stick or two. And now for a few knobs of coal laid on lightly. There! That'll be thoroughly alight in a couple of minutes, and then we can pile on as much more fuel as we please."

We sat down on the dirty floor as near to the stove as we could huddle, enjoying the warmth, chatting over the events of the day, and congratulating ourselves on having got out of an ugly scrape so successfully. The grimy little caboose, with its meagre comforts, might not have appealed to us favourably at another time; but just then, with a dozen ropes and a chain or two keeping up a constant hammering on the foremast, and reminding us how the gale was howling and shrieking without, we were fully of opinion that our quarters were quite as snug as we could wish for. The din of the storm outside was dulled by passing through the walls that shielded us; but it was sufficiently noisy to oblige us to speak up in order to carry on conversation. Indeed, it seemed to grow louder, and, mentioning this to Walter, I got up, slipped the panel, and stepped outside on deck.

Emerging from the lee of the galley I was nearly knocked off my legs by the violent, rain-laden gust that swept round the corner. The night was as dark as the pit. It was impossible to see a fathom before one, and the driving rain cut one's face like the lash of a tandem-whip. My observation was a short one, and stepping into the galley with a shiver, I closed the panel after me and resumed my seat on the floor.

"Well?" said Walter.

"It's getting worse."

"H'm; well, the tide will turn directly. In fact with this wind there'll be a short flood to-night, and I expect

the ebb will begin to make pretty nearly half an hour before its regular time—about midnight that will be, therefore; and at slack water the wind will change some way—either it will moderate, or it will harden down to blow in real earnest.”

“It can’t very well blow any harder than it is doing at present.”

“I hope it won’t try. But I shouldn’t make too sure about the gale being at its height now if I were you. It’s astonishing what pressure Old Boreas can get up when he just sets his mind to the work. He’s got his coat off now, I should judge; but if he wets his hands, and rolls up his shirt sleeves, you’ll see he can work the bellows nearly half as hard again.”

After a pause I reopened the conversation.

“Those fellows will have their work cut out to bring the boat off to-night.”

“I shouldn’t be surprised, Frank, if they stay on shore altogether. The odds are they have gone to the Nelson’s Head and got more or less screwed, after the genial manner of sailors during their first night ashore. If the skipper had been in his sober senses, surely he wouldn’t have allowed the schooner to ride out a gale like this all by herself. He would have come on board again as soon as he saw the wind begin to harden down. Now, as you say, they’d have their work cut out to get on board. Their boat would slip down easily enough, but if they failed to get hold of the schooner when she came alongside and got dropped astern, I

doubt very much if they'd be able to pull her up against the wind; and if they couldn't, nothing would prevent their being blown out to sea, unless, indeed, they got ashore on the mud-flats, in which case they would be upset and drowned all the same. Old Stubbles, the landlord, would know all this, and so if his guests were at all tipsy, he'd just keep them ashore till morning."

"Well," said I, "if it does turn out so, it won't hurt us particularly to stay where we are for the rest of the night. Only I'm beginning to feel rather empty. I've had neither bite nor sup since breakfast."

"Nor I, Frank, and in consequence I'm as hungry as two hunters rolled into one. Really I'm beginning to sympathize with people who steal from bakers' shops. I'd give something just now for a loaf of bread, a pound of cheese, and a pint of decent beer."

"Don't mention it," said I. "The mere thought of such luxuries makes me feel worse."

"Look here, Frank, starvation knows no law. I'm just going to constitute myself the skipper's deputy and play the host. What will you have? Give your orders. Everything edible in the ship is at your disposal."

"I'd like to see the *menu*, or failing that to inspect the contents of the pantry."

"But where is the pantry, Frank?"

"That's just the rub."

The caboose was the kitchen; but it certainly was

not, so far as we could see, the schooner's store-room. The little cupboard seemed as bare as that of the late Mother Hubbard. Even the savoury smell of boiled cabbage, which had assailed our nostrils on entering, had departed up the chimney. There didn't seem so much as a fly's luncheon about the place.

Bathurst inspected the cooking utensils. "The frying-pan," he observed, "seems to have been used for cooking bacon, for there is a little cold gray fat in it, but not sufficient for a meal. The kettle has served a double purpose, if one may judge by two solitary brown leaves. It is also the teapot of the community. But two tea leaves will not feed us. The sauce-pan—Hullo! this seems heavier. Let's lift off the lid. Good business! Here's an irregular lump of that nautical condiment familiarly known as salt horse. Real mahogany-textured beef, and half-boiled already. That chunk must weigh ten or twelve pounds. Well, stealing or not, I'm going to warm it up and eat as much as I want. Frank, if the bitings of your conscience are stronger than the gnawings of your stomach, you may be content with a surreptitious sniff. If, on the other hand, you are unable to withstand the temptation, I hereby invite you to fall morally with me."

The iron pan was inside the railings on the top of the stove by this time, and the fire, with fresh coal added, was roaring away fiercely beneath it. Bathurst took down the iron ladle from its hook, and

dipping it into the pot abstracted a sample of its liquid contents. Placing the ladle to his lips he sipped cautiously and pulled an extremely wry face after doing so. "It tastes," said he, "something like seawater stirred up with old shoes, with a piece of soap thrown in by way of flavouring. Here, you try."

I sipped, and remarked that I thought a ferret must have been boiled in that water some time recently.

"Then," said Bathurst, "soup is removed from the bill of fare *nem. con.* I'm far too hungry to be very particular just now, but I do hope the meat hasn't got a twang of this stuff in it."

The liquor in the pot began to simmer, and then to boil. Steam gushed out in white clouds and filled the dingy little caboose with a quaint-smelling gray fog. After the elapse of half an hour Walter fished the lump of meat out, and placing it in the lid by way of a dish, proceeded to attack it with his pocket-knife.

"It cuts remarkably like a log of well-seasoned oak," he remarked, after taking nearly a couple of minutes to saw off a small corner, "and it looks uncommonly like mahogany. But I think it's cooked enough." He nibbled a morsel off the piece he held in his hand and masticated it with apparent difficulty. "Yes, I suppose it's all right. Help yourself, Frank. Don't be shy. Take a lot."

I haggled off about half a pound and followed Bathurst's example. The meat was wonderfully hard,

in fact it was quite woody in texture, and it was just as salt as it possibly could be. But we had both keen sea-made appetites, and by dint of taking plenty of time about it, we made a satisfying if not wholly satisfactory meal. When it was finished we wiped and repocketed our knives, and sitting back again in the niches beside the stove, recommenced chatting over the events of the day.

However, before long the salt in the beef began to make its influence felt, and we contracted thirsts that demanded immediate attention. Bathurst volunteered to bring relief. Taking the kettle in his hand he said he would go outside to the scuttle-butt and replenish it. His absence was so prolonged that I was just on the point of going out to see what he was about when I heard him at the door, and so sank back into my place. He slid the panel aside. The yellow reeking flame of the slush-lamp blazed wildly and smokily to one side, and then resumed its normal up-and-down flicker, as the door was shot back in its grooves once more. He handed me the kettle, and after I had drunk thirstily from the spout, I asked what had kept him so long away.

"Well," said he, "getting the water wasn't the work of a minute. I had to hoist it up through the bung-hole with that small rusty dipper, and so could only get about a claret glassful at a time. And then when that was done, I thought there would be no harm in making a tour of inspection; so I came here and

dumped the kettle down outside the door, and then worked my way forward. My aunt, Frank, it is blowing! I never knew such a night. It was impossible to stand on the bare deck. I just had to haul myself forward hand over fist along the bulwarks. There was very little to see when I did get there. The cable was as stiff as though it were welded in one solid piece, and besides being twice round the barrel of the windlass, there are a couple of turns over the bitts; so it should be safe enough."

"Is the anchor coming home at all?" I asked.

"I don't think so; but I can only judge by the fact that we are still in smooth water, which we shouldn't be if she had dragged. But the night is as black as the bottom of the kettle, and I couldn't see the end of the bowsprit from where I stood. Both shores are clean out of sight, and there's nothing to get a bearing from."

"Has the ebb begun to make?"

"No; it's not due yet. But the flood is running up very slowly, at least so I judged by the ripples round her forefoot; but as I said it's so pitchy dark that one can make out very little."

"Do you happen to have found out the name of the schooner?" I asked after a little pause.

"Yes, when I was getting the water. There's a bell hung on the mainmast with *B. James Brock* on it. So I conclude that's her name; but where she hails from I can't tell. Her name will be painted on the stern.

I wonder we didn't notice it when she passed us this afternoon."

"Come to think of it, it's strange we didn't. But the *B. James Brock* is a strange craft to me. I never heard of her before."

"Nor I. She's never been into Potter's Cove within my memory; but as she seems to be a pretty old vessel, it doesn't follow she hasn't been in before. However, whether that is so or not, it is absolutely certain that there was someone on board of her who knew the channel, and that seems to argue a residence here at some time or other. The lucky individual, whoever he may be, has probably found friends ashore, and he and his shipmates are doubtless making a night of it. The Nelson's Head is closed long before this, and they'd have been off by now if they were coming. Depend upon it they've all got a shake-down somewhere, and we shall be left in undisturbed possession till morning. So, Frank, you may as well prick for a soft plank, and prepare to make yourself comfortable on it for the rest of the night. Of course, you can go aft and annex the skipper's bunk if you like, but I shall just turn in where I am. I'm blessed with a certain amount of cheek, and I don't stick at stealing salt junk when I'm hungry, but collaring a stranger's bed is just an inch or so beyond my mark. So good-night."

Walter was snoring vigorously half a minute after that, and for a while his noisy snorts kept me awake. I ruminated lazily over the incidents of the day, but

the subject had been too thoroughly thrashed out to preserve a lasting interest just then. The *Sheila* was irretrievably lost, and we were on board a strange schooner as self-invited guests—that was all. In elaborating the “might have been” I fell asleep.

How long I remained in the realm of oblivion I did not know and cannot tell at this moment. I was awakened by a confused sort of dream, and opening my eyes felt that there was something wrong. My senses returned to me drowsily and slowly, and then all of a sudden I found that my head was about ten inches lower than my heels. I had lain down on the bare boards with my arm for a pillow. Bathurst was beside me. When we fell asleep we were both lying thwart-ships on a level floor. Now the schooner had got a strong list to port, and the blood rushing to my head had wakened me.

Bathurst was still in his place, moving his arms about and occasionally speaking incoherently. It was evident that he also was suffering from nightmare. It might be the beef, it might be the heeling of the schooner; but as this last alteration perplexed me, I gave him a good stir. He woke with a start and a yell, and sat up rubbing his eyes.

“I’ve had such a rum dream,” he began, and was evidently going on to relate it when the slant of the floor caught his eye and he stopped. Waiting a moment or so to make sure his sight didn’t deceive him, he asked what was the meaning of it.

"I can't tell," I replied, "and that's principally why I woke you. It can't be the wind swinging her one way, and the tide trying to set her in another, for they are both in the same direction—unless, that is, the wind has dropped; but then, listen! it's blowing as hard as ever, and no amount of tide could hold her against that."

Bathurst scrambled to his feet, went to the door, and sliding it open, stepped outside. A minute later he was back.

"Good heavens, Frank! we've parted the cable or dragged the anchor and gone ashore. There's a surf hammering on her weather side, and sending sheets of spray clean up on deck." ✓

CHAPTER III.

BLOWN TO SEA.

I HAD sprung to my legs when Bathurst came in, and together we went out again into the night. We struggled up to the starboard side and leaned over the bulwarks. Everything was dark as pitch. The wind boomed and bellowed loudly. But above all the turmoil, the roar of a surf beating against the schooner's planking was distinctly audible; and sheets of briny spray that constantly beat into our faces, removed all possible doubt as to what had occurred.

Signing to me what he was about to do, Bathurst went forward. I followed, handing myself laboriously along the bulwarks. He got there a little before me, and I found him leaning over by the lee cat-head. The schooner had been riding to her port anchor. I looked over the sloping bulwark and saw the rusted chain dangling idly from the hawse-pipe. It led into the water certainly, but was more or less straight up and down. The fierce tension had proved too much for its strength. The cable had parted, and the *B. James Brock* had drifted stern-on before the gale till she fetched up on the mud.

We saw that in an instant. We were sure, too, of the exact point on which she had grounded, through an intimate knowledge of the intricacies of the estuary. But what ought to be done under the circumstances neither of us knew. Bathurst expressed this by shrugging his shoulders and holding out his hands helplessly, and I replied with a similar gesture.

Then a thought seemed to flash across his mind, and leading me across to the weather bulwarks, he motioned me to stoop down under their shelter. He said something, but though evidently bawling out the words at the top of his voice, I could not catch them, such was the row that was going on around us. So, despairing of communication in that way, we opened the fore-companion, slipped down the ladder, and closed the slide above our heads. It was an evil-smelling hole, dark as the inside of a corked barrel, and pretty

noisy too from the din outside. But by shouting we could make one another hear.

"We're on the Crab Spit," he said, "stuck just about the edge, I should think."

"Unless the wind has shifted we should be on the very tail," I assented. "And the tide's falling."

"I know it is. But if the schooner's where I think she is, there's deep water close to her, and she may work herself a channel through the mud and blow off into it with this gale. What I was trying to tell you above was this. We must get another anchor overboard as fast as we can, so as to hold her where she is in case she does take it into her head to try and change her berth. Come along on deck again. There's no time to be lost talking down here."

Up we went on deck, finding a spare anchor jammed in forward of the windlass. The end of the starboard cable was showing through its pipe; so we roused a few fathoms out on deck, and taking a couple of turns with it round the windlass, prepared to bend it on to the ring of the anchor. But though the shackle for that purpose was in its place, the screw had rusted firmly in, and we could not budge it. After many fruitless efforts to turn it, and much valuable time lost in hunting about for a lever to help, Bathurst took matches and the slush-lamp from the galley, and slipping down below into the fore-castle, emerged, after a prolonged search, with a marline-spike, which quickly did the business. But our efforts had been too protracted.

After listing more and more through the force of the squalls, till she was almost on her beam-ends, the schooner's weight literally tore away the edge of the bank on which she hung.

We guessed what had happened by her sudden righting. We desisted from our work and looked at one another in dismay. Long before we could get the heavy anchor hoisted over the side and sufficient length of cable roused up on deck, she would be in deep water where no ground-tackle that we had on board would tether her for a moment.

The noise of surf beating against the vessel's black wooden side had ceased now, and by bawling at the tops of our voices we could make one another hear.

"The wind will take us straight outside now without touching again," Bathurst shouted in my ear.

"Yes."

"But if she keeps her own course she will go on to the Turtleback Sand, and there isn't water enough to take her over."

"If she gets on it she'll go to pieces in a couple of hours, like that ketch did last winter."

"We must get her under command, Frank. Do you go and see if she will answer the helm. She should, if it hasn't got damaged when she took the ground. It's a bit lighter now, thank goodness! with these few stars out and no rain. Keep her in mid-channel till we're clear of the shores, and then hold your luff all

you can. I'll get this main-topmast stay-sail ready to run up if she won't look up to it under bare poles."

I made my way aft, cast off the ropes which held the clumsy tiller amidships, and looked out to see where I was. A glance at the nearest bank said half a mile from the mouth of the estuary. The schooner was drifting down almost sideways on. I gave her the helm hard. She answered promptly. You naturally wonder why I did not plump her ashore again, and so have avoided being driven to sea. With a small craft I certainly should have done so, and got her hard and fast on the mud with a falling tide. But with a vessel of the *B. James Brock's* draught that wouldn't have answered. The scour of the river had cut out a channel with steep walls. It was only the overflow of the tide that went above these, and on the flats there was little more than five feet of water just then. The schooner might have stuck, certainly, had I put her at them, but she would have only held by the bow. She was not going at pace enough to run the whole of her length on the shallow. And then, as soon as she was fast forward, tide and wind would swing her stern round and sweep her off again, with very likely her forefoot started. Besides, even if we had had an anchor ready, it wouldn't have held in that bad ground, but would have dragged out of the mud into the deep channel directly the cable tautened. So, as Bathurst had said, the only thing to do was to hold on.

She stood out of the estuary obediently enough, and

then I began gingerly to put down my helm. The gale snorted and shrieked through the rigging, and the schooner heeled over to it as though she were under a heavy press of canvas. But she stood along the new course fairly enough, and I saw that we could weather the Turtleback, with heaps to spare. Bathurst, who always has his eyes about him, saw this too, and, desisting from his occupation of getting the stay-sail ready for hoisting, came aft and joined me.

"Well, Frank," he bawled cheerily, "what do you think of our prospects?"

"Blue enough," I shouted back, feeling the reverse of contented with my lot.

"Oh, we'll have quite a pleasant cruise. One officer and one of a crew. We'll take it in turns to be skipper."

"I say, Walter, this is no time for fooling. We shall probably be drowned in an hour's time, unless we can find some way out of this mess."

"Drowned? Bosh! It's no mess, good man. Why, we've got deep water, with never rock or shoal in it, all the way to America; and the gale will have blown itself out long before we get there."

"It will," I rejoined grimly enough; for this habit that Bathurst had of joking when we happened to get into a mess, and which I knew of old, had always the effect of ruffling my temper. "It will have done before we get there—you're right—and so will a good many other gales. Look how she's pitching, and we aren't a mile from the land yet. Just think what a sea there

will be running further out! And as we go on it will increase."

"Oh, of course there'll be some pretty heavy waves," he replied as coolly as though he were discussing the beauties of a sunset, and not standing on the deck of a small runaway schooner in the middle of a howling storm. "Of course there will be heavy waves. But if we make up our minds that they aren't going to swamp us, why, they just won't. I haven't been drowned yet, Frank, and I don't intend to begin learning yet a while."

"You're a fool," said I politely.

"Thank'ee kindly," returned he with a grin. "But I rather think I'm a wise man for being cheerful under adverse circumstances. But let that pass. Haven't—"

"Look here," I interrupted, "just be sensible for half a minute. Can't we heave her to, head to wind? We could ride out the gale more easily like that, and not find ourselves so far from shore when it moderated."

"My good Frank, how would you propose to execute such a manœuvre? You couldn't make her lie to under bare poles. And if you got any of the main-sail on her, it would either be blown away, or if it held it would nip the mast out of her, or if that didn't go she would turn the turtle bodily. No, Frank, it's blowing a precious deal too hard to try little experiments of that kind."

"Then our only alternative is—"

"To run on and keep her going as dead straight as

we can before the seas, and trust to our own nerves, arms, and eyesight, and to the workings of Providence. So long as we can manage to meet her with the tiller when she shows a wish to yaw, and can keep her clear of following seas which wish to come aboard, we shall be all right. And if the waves do show an inclination to peep us, why, then we must show a few square feet of canvas forward and make her hop along a bit quicker, and so keep herself out of harm's way."

"I verily believe you're enjoying yourself," said I acidly; for I was in a mortal funk, and Bathurst's light-heartedness riled me.

"I won't say I do not wish we were out of it," he rejoined. "But the excitement is not without its charm. We ought to make the most of it. We may never enjoy a similar experience again."

"You may be sure we shain't," I interrupted savagely.

"Ah, you're harping on the old question again: you think we are going to be drowned. I, on the contrary, don't agree with you in the least upon that point. This is just the weather the *B. James Brock* was built for. In light airs a yacht of her tonnage and rig would give her half distance and a beating. In a heavy blow like this the yacht would sink most probably, and make very little fuss about it. But the apple bow and round bluff stern of this craft have such a buoyant power that they'll rise over almost any wave. She's not overweighted with cargo either. There's just enough in the hold to keep her nice and

stiff, and not sufficient to make her sluggish. Here, give me the helm a bit. You've had a longish spell now."

I resigned the tiller, and taking my stand by the port bulwarks, held on by the main shrouds. The early summer's dawn was breaking cold and gray over a boundless space of troubled ocean. The land astern was out of sight. Ahead the nearest point of *terra firma* lay somewhere on the North American coast. A remembrance of that seemed to make the look-out doubly cheerless. The scene was grand, beyond doubt; but I was in no mood to appreciate such grandeur just then. The schooner was rushing up the watery hills, tearing through their snowy crests in a pother of foam and a cloud of spray, and racing down the steep side of the next dale with her decks at such a slope that one might well believe she was heading for a slanting dive right down to the sea-floor.

Looking aft, one might almost always see some great wave, whose hoary, crumbling head threatened momentarily to descend over the stern in a watery avalanche. It seemed a wonder that none of them ever pooped us. But as they came closer, the schooner's buoyancy asserted itself; and they would divide and rush shrieking past either quarter, whilst a torrent of yeasty, creamy water would squirt in through the tiller-port and spread over the decks till it drained out of the scuppers.

Spindrift, torn by the gale from the crests of the waves, was cutting through the air in every direc-

tion, whipping the face like sleet, and circumscribing the view to a misty circle of less than half a mile's radius. There was no other vessel in sight of us, nothing but the gray and white tangle of waves, the cold, driving sea-mist, and the tearing sky of neutral tint close overhead.

Bathurst was standing straddle-legged on the glistening decks, holding the tiller in one hand and the tiller-rope in the other, looking as cool and comfortable as though he was steering the poor old *Sheila* out to the Turtleback, with an easy whole-sail breeze, for a day's trawling. I never saw such a fellow as he was. He'd worry himself over trifles. They told me he nearly fidgeted himself into a fever about getting his place in the Eton boat, which everyone knew was a certainty. But over any big scrape of this kind—and he and I had been in one or two together before—he was just as cheerful and confident of getting through as though he knew for an absolute certainty that “all would come right in the end.”

We had been going on scud, scud, scudding through this wild scene for what seemed an immense time, and all the while the seas had been getting higher and more threatening. The little schooner laboured amongst them terribly, pitching and swaying till one expected to see the masts hove clean out of her.

Struck with an idea, I made my way to Bathurst, and holding on to the tiller-rope inside him, yelled what I wanted to say into his ear.



"Can't we house these topmasts? She'd be far easier without them."

"She would, you're right; but they hold the wind and drive her along. It wouldn't do to stop her at all. The waves out here are beginning to follow up faster than they did, and they'll get worse as we recede from the shore. We must get some canvas on her or she'll be pooped soon."

"What'll you have? Stay-foresail, or boom-foresail with the throat lashed down? Make your choice, and I'll go forward and try to set it."

"I'm afraid neither would do. You see, she's yawing about so much that they'd be jibbing across every half-minute, and would slat themselves to pieces or whip the mast out of her in no time. Here, take you the helm and I'll see if I can't show her a bit of fore-topsail."

Leaving the tiller in my hands, he scudded off forward along the slippery decks and swung himself into the starboard shrouds. The pressure of the gale was so heavy that it was all he could do to shift his feet from one ratline to another, and his clothes bade fair to be blown clean off him; but he gained the little top at last, and after resting there for a minute climbed higher and set off along the slippery, swaying foot-rope of the port topsail yard-arm.

What he was doing I didn't exactly know, but I was in a perfect agony of fear lest the whole fabric should blow bodily away, as it momentarily threatened

to do, and carry him with it. But he went on confidently enough with his unaccustomed task, apparently casting off one rope and lashing it on again in a fresh place nearer the mast; and when he had completed it he lay out on the other side and went through the same operation again. The violent motion of the vessel was intensified, of course, at that height, and as he had to keep a very strong hold to prevent being shot off—as one flips an orange-pip—into the seething, boiling waters alongside, his work took him a very long time. Indeed, I should say it was quite three-quarters of an hour before he was again on deck; but once there it did not take him long to put the finishing touch to his task. Laying hold one by one of those chains which had annoyed us by thrashing the fore-mast during the previous night, he broke out two triangular corners of fore-topsail from their temporary lashing, and sheeted them well home.

There weren't twenty square feet altogether in those two goose-wings of grimy canvas, but the difference they made to the schooner was immense. She simply flew along like a race-horse, tearing up the liquid hills, and down over them, defying every effort of the treacherous crests to stop her, and moving far too fast for any of the following waves to catch her up and thunder down on her poop. In fact, I thought at first that she would overrun the seas, and so we should be in danger from the other extreme; but Bathurst saw this as soon as I did, and starting his sheets a little,

steadied down her pace to exactly the right speed. Then he came aft again and joined me.

"How does she steer now, Frank?"

"Much handier. She hasn't tried to broach-to once since you gave her those rags of sail."

"A pull is better than a push any day. And being high up, those corners of top-sail won't be becalmed when we're in the trough. The only thing I'm doubtful of is whether the top-mast will stand it. I should have preferred a bit of square-sail lower down, only I didn't well see how it could be managed. And now I think it wouldn't be a bad plan to strike that main-topmast."

It took him an hour to do this, for the spar was a heavy one, and he had to hunt up the watch-tackle before he could start the heel-rope; but he got it snugly housed at last, and the *B. James Brock* was easier for the alteration.

"There," he said, looking admiringly at his handiwork as though the schooner was snugly moored in Potter's Cove instead of tearing through a howling storm in the open Atlantic; "there, for a first effort at anything of the kind, I think that will bear inspection. And now, although I haven't the vaguest notion what the hour is, we'll call it grub-time. As we've run away with the schooner, we may as well complete our villainy by browsing on the best fare she can offer us."

Down he dived through the little after-companion,

emerging shortly afterwards with a couple of bottles of beer and half a dozen big sea-biscuits. He went to the galley, and returned bringing a couple of knobs of the salt beef.

“Here you are, Frank,” he shouted. “Here’s luxury. You can almost fancy you’re picnicking up the Thames again. Give me the helm and sit down and eat your fill. There isn’t a corkscrew, so you must knock off the neck of the bottle with the back of your knife.”

We had our meal, and the day wore on, getting worse rather than better. We shipped one heavy sea, which tore away a tidy slice from the stout port bulwarks, as though the heavy planking had been so much paper, leaving but two or three splintered stanchions projecting above the level deck; and later on another huge wave snapped the jib-boom off like a carrot at the bowsprit end.

But it was not till night had fallen over the wild scene that the heaviest disaster overtook us. Just as the wet, cold darkness closed over, a heavy rain-squall hissed down upon us, and the two corners of the top-sail blew away with the storm-wrack, leaving nothing but a fluttering rag or two on the straining bolt-ropes to show where they had been. Then the tearing fingers of the wind got hold of the bunt of the sail, and partly unstowing it, blew it out in a billowing, slatting balloon of grimy canvas. The rigging strained and jarred, and the topmast bent. Then the

triatric stay¹ parted, and, with a crack that rose even above the thundering turmoil of the gale, the foremast was carried away some eight feet from the deck, and toppled over the bows with its gear, a tangled mass of unwieldy wreckage.

Deprived of the power which drove her, the schooner broached to immediately, and fell off into the trough despite all that Bathurst could do to prevent her. The crest of the next wave fell sprawling on her decks. Almost driven through the planking by the force of the shock, I thought that my last moment was come. But like some huge empty bottle, she shook herself clear of the deluge, and bobbed over the next two waves almost dry.

I could see Walter busy with his knife at the tyers of the mainsail; but before my dazed senses could grasp what he was up to, souse came another comber thundering over us, and again I expected the schooner would crumble up under the impact. But she shook herself free again as before, and, saving for the loss of almost all her starboard bulwarks, did not seem much the worse for the experience.

Bathurst beckoned me, and I scrambled off to his assistance. He motioned that I should help him heave on the main halyards, which I did, and together we hoisted the throat about a yard and a half. It would not go further, as the peak of the gaff was lashed securely to the boom, but that small fragment of cloth

¹ The rope joining the two mast-heads.

was almost enough to hold the schooner over on to her beam-ends. It served its purpose, however, for whilst her bows were kept more or less stationary by the drag of the foremast and its gear to which they were attached, the stern payed rapidly off, and the *B. James Brock* found herself riding at a sea anchor head to wind.

The rain-squall which had caused all the mischief had blown past us by this time, and brilliant stars shone down from an almost clear sky. Our eyes were attuned to the darkness, and by the starlight we could see plainly. The havoc of the last few minutes was something awful. A clean sweep had been made of almost everything that projected above the deck. Windlass was unshipped, and the fore-companion clean gone. The caboose, despite the stout iron bands which clamped it to the deck, had vanished without leaving more than a rim of grime to mark its site. And of the stout four-foot bulwarks, scarcely half-a-dozen fathoms remained.

"Come along forward," Bathurst shouted in my ear. "We'll admire old Neptune's hedge carpentry afterwards. Meanwhile that wreckage is hammering away vigorously, and it will batter a hole through the bows of her if we don't look out."

We went forward and surveyed the situation. We were riding to the wreckage as to a sea anchor, and it would not do to cut it adrift altogether, as she would certainly broach-to again into the trough, and either

turn the turtle or be battered to pieces in a very short space of time. But then, on the other hand, to leave it as it was would be to have our bows stove in before another hour was past. So we divided the lanyards of the starboard shrouds with our knives, and the tangled mass of wood, and iron, and cordage swung clear, and we rode to it chiefly by the fore-stay and the port shrouds.

The back of the gale was clearly broken, and the wind had gone down considerably after that last squall which brought it to a climax; but the sea was running as high as ever. The wreckage served as a breakwater on which the larger waves spent their strength, and we rode fairly dry on the whole; but being almost entirely without bulwarks now, it is not to be wondered at that a little water found its way on board every now and then. Most of this was quickly tossed overboard again; but some naturally cascaded through the open fore-hatch, and to repair this gaping rent in our defences was our next most obvious task. We slipped down below. Walter was lucky enough to lay his hand upon a bag which contained amongst other things hammer and nails, and I wrenched a couple of boards from the sides of bunks. Armed with these we climbed the ladder again, and soon had the opening securely covered.

Then after taking a final look around to see if there was anything else which needed our present attention, and finding nothing, we went aft again and sat on the

deck with our backs against the cleat-rack round the mainmast.

I yawned wearily; Bathurst yawned too; and then we both looked at one another.

"Look here," said he, "we are both clean fagged out, and if we drop off to sleep here the odds are we shall be rolled overboard. I vote we just go below and turn in decently. We can't do any earthly good here on deck. She'll look after herself perfectly, I hope and expect, and anyway there's no use in our making ourselves miserable by staying out in turn on the watch."

I was far too weary to give voice to an opposite opinion, even if I had held one; so slipping down the companion, and closing the slide carefully after us, we clambered into a couple of bunks, and covering up our soaking clothes with the blankets were asleep almost instantly.

CHAPTER IV.

WATER-LOGGED.

I SLEPT refreshingly for a long time, and woke slowly.

There seemed no apparent necessity to get up just then, so feeling very drowsy and comfortable I determined to lie for a few minutes longer where I was. I let my head sink back on the pillow and looked about me.

Save from an occasional creaking of door or bulk-head all was still. The roar of the gale had gone. The sun was shining through one side of the skylight overhead, and flooding the little cabin with cheerful light. The schooner was gliding easily and rhythmically over a heavy swell—I knew the motion well enough.

We were safe so far, and in no immediate danger, as I judged. So if I indulged in a few minutes' more bunk it wouldn't hurt anyone.

And this cabin belonged to the officers of the *B. James Brock*—her skipper and his mate. Well, it was a queer little den. One bunk a-side, close under the deck. Beneath them, lockers. Then a bare wooden bench, and in it lockers again. There was a fixed table amidships, and that was the whole of the furniture, unless one reckons in the gimbaled compass and the tin-shaded paraffin lamp which swung in the skylight overhead. Warmth was evidently more aimed at than ventilation, and the little place was stuffy in the extreme. But that last defect may probably be accounted for by the fact of our having slept there so long with sealed doors.

My eyes were taking in the details of this humble sea parlour and bed-room, when I was startled by hearing a sound which made me very wide-awake indeed.

"Walter!" I cried out, and my companion woke. "Listen to that swishing noise. We've sprung a leak; she's full of water."

"Then," said Bathurst airily, "we must turn to and pump her dry again."

We went up on deck, and a glance over the side showed how low she was in the water.

There were a couple of pumps, one on either side of the main-mast, and both were luckily undamaged. Stripping to shirt and trousers, Bathurst and I took to the handles and worked as vigorously as we knew how. Water gushed out in clear green streams, and we could tell by that ominous appearance that there was plenty more where it came from. Previous to beginning we had lowered the sounding rod, carefully dried, into the well; and after every half-hour's spell we measured our work. The progress was painfully slow. We reduced the level by a bare inch in the hour. To keep the water from gaining would be as much as we should be able to do.

Having arrived at this unpleasant conclusion, Bathurst said:

"Some of this water no doubt came in through the fore-hatch, but as none is getting in that way now it stands to reason she's sprung a leak somewhere, and that keeps up the supply. The obvious cure is to find that same leak and caulk it."

We got off a hatch and found that the cargo consisted of machinery of some kind or other in heavy wooden packing-cases.

"Well, if the worst comes to the worst," said my chum, "we must rig up a tackle and hoist out the

lading case by case and pitch it overboard. But I expect the leak's forward where that wreckage hammered against her. Here, Frank, I'll take a spell now at that pump. Go down into the fore-castle and see if you can lay your hand upon the weak place."

I went forward, wrenched off one of the planks that were nailed across the open hatch, and slipping down the ladder gained the deck below. The sea-water with which the place had been so recently deluged had removed the old fusty smell, and substituted for it a dank earthy sort of odour, which, though quite different, was scarcely an improvement. But about this I did not trouble my head. There was something on hand which outweighed all questions of scents, malodorous or otherwise. Groping about the dark little hutch till my hands fell upon slush-lamp and matches, I struck a light, lit and trimmed the black oily wick, and set about a systematic search for the leak.

As is usually the case, the outer planking of the vessel was entirely hidden from view by an inner layer of thin wood—a ceiling it is called—which was nailed to the timbers. At first I thought of ripping this off, when I could discover no traces of a fracture in it; but a happier idea struck me. One or two of the floor-boards of the fore-castle were loose, and after lifting them up I should be easily able to wrench up the rest if necessary. But lowering down the smoky lamp, I peered into the dark recess. My eyes fell on a small harness-cask full of salt beef. Hauling this up with

some difficulty, for it was a tolerable weight, I looked down again. There was water there certainly, which came flooding up as the schooner pitched into a hollow, and which ebbed away as her bows rose to the next swell; but there was no gap in the timbers through which fresh brine welled in, and there was no trickling from behind the ceiling to tell of some leak hidden up above.

To make sure, I left no cranny under the flooring unexamined, and then extinguishing my lamp, climbed up the ladder into daylight, quite satisfied that wherever the leak might be, it was not in the fore-castle. Going back aft with my report, we knocked off work for a while to breakfast off biscuits, beer, and part of a ham which had been discovered in one of the captain's lockers. After that we set about striking out the cargo. To do this we lowered the fore-boom by its burton on to the deck, and then shoving it over to port, lashed it there. Then casting off the foregaff from the head of the sail, we hooked on the burton and hoisted it up, so that we had a well-secured spar above the main-hatch. As there was no winch, we rigged up a watch-tackle purchase, and with the fall leading forward, Bathurst hoisted up box after box on deck, and waiting for a roll of the schooner, shot them overboard. They were very heavy and sank like stones. My station was down below, where I slipped on the slings—a work of some difficulty and danger, for when a gap had been made in a tier, the other

cases were apt to slide about at their own sweet will when the schooner gave a heavier lurch than usual, and I had to look pretty lively to avoid getting crushed.

The wind, which had fallen almost completely before sundown, got up again when the moon rose, and shortly after midnight was blowing very stiffly. The weight of water in her holds made the *B. James Brock* roll heavily and sluggishly, and seas were constantly sweeping over her. Despite the fact that we had re-battened down all the openings in the deck, and were working steadily at both pumps, the water was gaining on us surely if slowly. The little vessel was straining a good deal, as the creaking and groaning of her timbers announced, and the leak doubtless gaped more and more widely. The monotonous clank-clank of the two pumps was kept up unremittingly, and when dawn began to gray the gloom there seemed every prospect that the day would worsen instead of improve. A cold drizzling rain was beating up with the wind, and everything was dreary and wet and miserable. And the wind, which was apparently nailed in the east, was setting us further and further off our own shore.

"Look here," Bathurst said at last, "it's a very unprofitable employment making the Atlantic circulate through our bottom timbers. We must get at the leak, even if we have to strike out every pound weight of cargo she has in the hold. I grant what you said

about the necessity of leaving some for ballast; but when we rig a jury foremast, it will be small and won't carry much press of canvas, and so we shall just] have to risk sailing her bang light."

Whilst the darkness lasted it was impossible to attempt this; but when day once more lit up the scene, we returned to our task of hoisting out the cargo. The fall of the tackle was remanned, and case after case was tumbled into the Atlantic. As before I was below, and needless to say I found the task increased in danger and unpleasantness. With the hold half-full of water that surged and swished about with every roll of the vessel, I was in a normal state of being half-drowned, and as the loosened cargo was perpetually lurching and shifting, I was often in imminent peril of being crushed to death. But life is cheap in such straits as surrounded us then, and I did not dream of backing out of my perilous employment.

Case by case we got hold of that cargo, whipped it up on deck, and let it slide overboard; and when but a score or two of boxes were left we took a short spell of rest, and then turned to again at the pumps. Though backs were aching, and tired arms ready to drop from their sockets with fatigue, we worked doggedly on, knowing full well that there was no chance of coming at the leak with such a mass of water rolling about in the hold to mask it.

The next night and the next day and the night after that dragged their weary hours past in similar fashion.

I will not describe them. Indeed they were devoid of incident, and were only remarkable for an endless round of unprofitable toil, interspersed by hurried snatches of sleep. The water gained upon us hair's-breadth by hair's-breadth, slowly, sometimes irregularly, but ever surely. It was well over the cabin floors by this time, and splashed into the bunks when she rolled.

The sun came up, sulphur-coloured, above the eastern horizon. The wind had dropped. The day bade fair to be a hot and fine one. We were both stretched out on the deck aft, dead beat. We could neither of us pump another stroke; we were half-killed with fatigue. Bathurst was on his back, looking more fagged-out than I had ever seen him look before, but awake, and evidently thinking.

"The leak's got the upper hand of us, Walter," I said.

"I'm afraid it has," he replied, evidently loth to make the admission.

"Then don't you think that, as soon as we are able to get on our legs again, we had better set about making some sort of raft? We can take a moderate amount of time about it, build the thing pretty safe, and store all our grub and water on board. We might stand some chance of getting picked up."

"That depends if anyone sees us. We haven't sighted a single sail so far during the daylight, or any lights at night. It's beginning to strike me that we are out

of the track of ships, and not knowing in the least where we do happen to be, it seems rather a mad sort of thing to go navigating a raft in a purely speculative direction."

"But if we stay on the schooner," said I, rather nettled at having my suggestion discountenanced, "we are bound to go to the bottom in twenty-four hours."

"Not a bit of it, Frank," he returned. "If the *B. James Brock* had happened to be an iron vessel, I grant you that she would very soon in all probability be transferred to the realms of Davy Jones. But as it is she is wood; and being wood, and having no heavy cargo to counteract the natural buoyancy of her fabric, she'll float well enough although the water in her holds was washing against the deck-beams. Mind you, I've thought out the question of a raft already, and have come to the conclusion that we're best off as we are. You see, a raft is a clumsy craft at the best of times. It will sail very little except dead before the wind; it would be something appalling to row; and in a hard blow it would be constantly under water, and would probably soon break up. Besides, what have we got to make one out of? There are the yards on the foremast, but they are too heavily doctored with iron to float well; there are the two booms, unsuitable for a like reason; there are the gaffs and the topmasts. With a good deal of labour we could lash them in triangle or square; but what is there to lay across them? The deck is too firmly nailed down for us to rip its planks away, and

you see the galley and nearly all the bulwarks which might have served for such a purpose have been swept away. There are no casks, even, which we could bung up and lash underneath to give it buoyancy. So you see, although a raft is all very well in theory, it would be an uncommonly poor affair supposing we were to set about building one in reality."

"Come to think of it," I agreed, "the materials are certainly not forthcoming. Then should we go back to these infernal pumps?"

"No; it's no use breaking our hearts over them any further. She won't sink above a foot further now, I expect; and if she does, why, we can't prevent her."

As Bathurst had predicted, the *B. James Brock* had sunk nearly as low as she was going to. When we desisted from our efforts at the pumps she took in eight more inches of water pretty rapidly, and there stopped. The natural buoyancy of her fabric had asserted itself, and she would not settle down any further though a whole plank were started out of her bottom. Never very comfortable as a residence, she was less so than ever now, as the swishing water had driven us completely out of fore-castle and after-cabin; and even in the calmest weather she rolled and pitched so heavily that seas were constantly cascading across her decks.

The constant bath of sea-water, though unpleasant for ourselves, would soon have spoiled some of our provisions had we left them exposed to it. The biscuit in

particular had to be kept dry. Some of it was mouldy with damp already, but picking this out for immediate consumption, we slung the sack containing the rest on to the end of the gaff topsail halyards, and, swaying it up chock-a-block, passed a lashing round it, so that, with a piece of oilskin to cover all, it would keep thoroughly dry. The small harness-cask of salted meat was also perched up out of harm's way, so that unless the mast was pitched out of her—which we did not think likely, considering the fierce tests it had already withstood—we had the whole of our edibles safe. The bottled beer was finished; and the water, being snugly stowed away in casks, would very well take care of itself.

For our personal comfort we partly unstowed main and fore-sail, making a couple of nests—half-bunk, half-hammock—in each, capable of containing a single person and keeping him tolerably dry, unless the water-logged craft took on board a larger wave than usual.

Our hope was that some vessel would heave in sight and bear up to render us assistance. To attract such we had a tattered red ensign, lashed jack downwards, in the starboard main rigging. This, of course, would be invisible at night, and being unaware what was the orthodox signal of distress to make during the hours of darkness, we lit and trimmed the red and green side-lights, and white riding light, and hung them in a cluster at the mast-head. This might not be very correct, but we hoped that, being out of the

common, it would invite inspection, and so serve our purpose.

But as yet we had sighted neither sail nor steamer's smoke.

CHAPTER V.

A DESPERATE SIGNAL.

TWO more days passed, the wind keeping in the eastward, or the southward and eastward, and holding fairly fresh the whole time. The condition of the schooner did not tend to improve. Though strongly built, she was an old vessel, and the heavy straining she had undergone, and was still being perpetually subjected to, was not without its effect. If the weather came on bad again we might very reasonably expect her to go to pieces beneath our feet. And so when, after the lapse of time which I have indicated, the sun set amongst stormy purple clouds in the west, and we saw with the last light that lit the eastern horizon every prospect of another gale coming down upon us as soon as the darkness had settled, we had neither of us much hope of being above water to witness another sunrise. Even Bathurst's spirits, which up to now had been irrepressible, had sunk, and he deigned to stigmatize our outlook as "getting a bit blue."

I reiterated my suggestion about a raft. But he would have none of it.

"Such a raft as we could make with the material at our command now would be useless if it does come on to blow. The schooner may live through it, and if she breaks up there will be plenty of pieces for us to cling on to till morning. We must build our raft then."

The first four-hour watch fell to my share, and in it the wind settled down to blow as we had anticipated. The wreckage ahead, to which she still rode by the tangle of cordage, kept her bow to the seas, and broke the heavier ones; but she was low in the water, and almost entirely without bulwarks, and so the decks were swept constantly the whole time. I could hear her fabric creaking and groaning as though it might collapse into its primitive staves at any minute; and when the watch came to an end I turned Walter out to relieve me, and crept into his wet berth in the bunt of the main-sail, fully persuaded that the damp canvas was going to be my shroud. Yet for all that I slept, and slept soundly too, for we were both of us too wearied ever to lie awake when the chance came for a short "watch below."

How long my eyes had been closed I know not, but a shout from Walter, in which I distinguished just the words "chemist's shop," roused me, and I slipped from my roosting-place.

"There, to starboard, Frank," exclaimed my companion, "a steamer just over the quarter. Shout for all you're worth."

I added my voice to his, and the two of us bawled

in concert. We yelled with the energy of despair, emitting every particle of sound that throat and lungs were capable of. But the fierce breath of the gale whipped away the frantic sounds into space, and of the three lights that were coming up astern the green one was soon eclipsed.

We yelled on, watching the red light draw abeam, and presently disappear also, leaving only the white mast-head lamp to mark the steamer's course through the darkness.

Bathurst stopped hailing. "We must risk it," he said, and without further explanation slid off the cover of the after-companion and slipped below.

What he was up to I didn't know. I continued to send my frantic shouts away towards the steamer, thinking a hail our only chance of signalling her. But presently a light streamed through the cabin skylight, and directly afterwards Bathurst reappeared on deck.

"It was our only chance," he exclaimed, "or I wouldn't have done it. You know there was a big can of paraffin below? Well, I've moistened some rags with oil, stuffed them into the mouth of the can, and set them on fire. There will be an explosion in a minute, and we shall have a blazing beacon directly afterwards that can be seen for miles. It is a desperate thing to do, but it is our only hope. Come forward now or we may get blown up."

We scrambled forward by the aid of life-lines, which

were stretched fore and aft along the decks. Scarcely had we gained the stump of the foremast when, with a loud report, skylight and companion flew up into the air, and from the gaps there roared forth two volumes of yellow smoking flame, which shot up like volcanoes. The main-sail and its spars quickly took fire, and blazing flakes of canvas blew away down the wind in a glittering stream. Despite the constant soaking it had had of late, despite the seas, which were even then pouring over it, the deck was soon in flames, which, fanned by the wind, boomed like a furnace. Occasionally, when a heavier wave hit her, there would be a fierce hissing as from a jungle full of angry snakes, and the yellow tongues of flame would die down a little; but the moment after they would burst out again more venomously than before, licking up the water, and diluting the inky smoke with white billowy steam.

Our beacon was lit. It was large and brilliant enough to signal over twenty miles of ocean. The watch on the steamer could not avoid seeing it. The only question was, Would they turn back and attempt to rescue us? It was quite on the cards that they might hold on. There are plenty of instances in the annals of shipping where such things have been done, and in calm weather too. Now it was blowing half a gale. Would they think that sufficient excuse to leave us to our fate?

We watched the mast-head light of the receding

steamer with a terrible anxiety. It was lessening visibly, and every now and again becoming eclipsed behind the mast.

Inhuman wretches! They were holding on their course. Our danger was no concern of theirs. The loss of a few paltry hours' time was of far more importance to them than the lives of unknown fellow-creatures.

But no; we had wronged them. The mast-head lamp gleamed white and round again. Then the red port light appeared, and then the green lamp came into view and completed the triangle.

She had swung round, and was heading directly towards us.

Meanwhile the fire burnt away. Fanned by the gale, the seas that poured over the flames seemed only to increase their fury. The stern was all in a blaze, and the flames were creeping up forward against the wind, foot by foot. We retreated before them into the very eyes of her, painfully scorched by the intense heat, in spite of the cold douches that were perpetually pouring over us.

Would rescue never come? The steamer had hove-to a quarter of a mile to windward of us, and by the light of a port-flare that was burnt on deck we saw her man and lower her starboard life-boat. But when the composition burned out we could make out no more, as the glare from our own fire prevented us from seeing into the darkness.

The tornado of flame had crept so close to us, that,

unable to bear it longer, we were forced overboard, and, clambering down by the trailing cordage, got on to the foremast, and collected round the "top."

Then a hail fell on our ears. The boat had approached unseen in the darkness, and was close at hand.

Even then it was by no means easy work to establish communication. There was, as I have said, a heavy sea running, and great caution had to be exercised to prevent the life-boat being stove in by the floating wreckage. But at last she manœuvred up alongside the mast, and took us off.

In the meanwhile the steamship had dropped down to leeward of the blazing *B. James Brock*, and so her boat was saved a big pull back against wind and sea. Four strong oars did their work, and we were quickly alongside. The davit tackles were in the water, and the moment they were hooked on, a steam-winch nipped her up in the air as though she had been light as a spume-flake; and directly afterwards we found ourselves in the middle of a sympathetic crowd of seamen on the stranger's deck.

CHAPTER VI.

THE S.S. *LYNX*.

THE S.S. *Lynx* was a vessel of some twelve hundred odd tons, Clyde-built, and powerfully engined. She could make eighteen knots under forced draught, and averaged thirteen when under weigh. She had left England with coal enough on board to steam four thousand miles at this latter pace, part of that fuel being in her bunkers, and the balance in a space partitioned off from the holds specially for it. Yet in spite of this, her cargo proper was sufficiently light to allow a good four feet of daylight to remain visible below her Plimsoll's disc.

I had asked something about this, and the captain, looking up across the breakfast-table with a half smile on his red face, made reply:

"Well, Mr. Musgrave, I might call the cargo 'machinery,' same as that you hove overboard from the schooner you ran away with, for 'machinery' it was entered as in the bills of lading, and the purser there'll tell you he's got it invoiced down as such. Indeed," continued the captain, who thoroughly appreciated his little joke—"indeed I'd be perfectly willing to take oath before a magistrate that it was machinery, but at the same time I'd be perfectly free to admit that another name would describe it better. In fact, to tell the truth, Mr. Musgrave, it's war machinery we've got

for freight; a regular assorted lot, everything from a twenty-ton quick-firing gun to an ordinary navy revolver."

I thought he was trying to humbug me, and saying in a half-laughing tone that there could not be very much demand for some of the articles, asked if he was going to hawk them about from port to port till he got the lot sold.

Captain Macadam took my words seriously. "Good heavens, no, Mr. Musgrave; d'ye take me for a sea pedlar? There there, well, I see you didn't. The thing's been kept pretty dark so far, but as we're snugly in blue water now I may as well tell you what we're up to. You know there's a war on between Chili and Peru. You've just seen a line about it in the newspaper, perhaps, and nothing more. They don't think much of it in England; but out there it's a thundering big thing, let me tell you. They're flying at one another's throats as only chaps with Spanish blood in them know how to, and each is doing all he knows to make t'other throw up the sponge. That being so, they're both keen as mustard to have the latest European slaughtering tackle, and have ordered stuff in the newest fashion, regardless of expense. The rub is to get it delivered. Ye see Great Britain's at peace with both of 'em, and by some law or other it don't do for a friendly power to supply goods of that kind in time of war. I don't rightly understand the matter myself, but they tell me that's the way the thing runs. However, they're

pretty free-handed with their cash, these Spanish Americans, when they've got one of their scrimmages on—hope to get it back again out of the other party, I suppose—and when there's plenty of money flying about, most things can be done for it. So you see the proper men went to work, and called on my owners, and told 'em to name their own price. And the consequence is that the *Lynx* was chartered for the job, and all hands, from after-guard down to stokers, get double screw for the run. Of course there's a bit o' risk, but then that's all in the day's work, and besides we're paid for it."

"You haven't told me which side you're for—not that it matters much."

"It is the Peruvians who have chartered us. Not that it matters much, as you say. But being as it is, I hope they'll win. That's their agent, that yellow-faced monkey-looking little chap that just went into the state-room. He's General Andarrez, with a fore-part to his name as long as the main signal halyards."

"And has he been listening to what you were saying?"

The captain laughed.

"You may go and call him a fool to his face, Mr. Musgrave, if you like, and he won't offer to hit you. He don't know a blessed word of English, and the purser's the only man on board that knows his patter."

Bathurst had preferred to breakfast in his bunk,

but he came on deck in the course of the afternoon, and I retailed the captain's information. He did not seem pleased with the prospect.

"Of course we were rather hurried last night," he said, "when we made choice of a steamer, and hadn't much time to pick and choose. But it strikes me we shall be rather longer getting home than I care about. I am much beholden to Captain Macadam for his hospitality, and I'll freely own that no one could have shown more kindness than he has done. He's given us a state-room apiece, rigged us out from truck to keel, as he calls it, and promised us a free passage back to Liverpool. But—"

"I never saw such a contrary sort of person as you are, Walter," I interrupted. "You made out you were as happy as a king when we were being blown off shore in that miserable old *B. James Brock*, and here you tumble into snug quarters in a smart steamer, and you begin to grumble directly."

"I was thinking of my people, and of yours, Frank," he replied quietly. "As likely as not they would never miss us for a week, each thinking we were at the other's place in the usual way. But at the end of that time they will certainly find out that something is wrong. And you can guess what their anxiety will be. Now, we shall have no chance of communicating with them for an age. The *Lynx* will touch nowhere till she makes her port in Peru, and even from there, we shall not perhaps be able to send a message to tell

of our safety. You know the cables are nearly always 'muzzled' in war-time."

It had never struck me in this light before. So used was I to absences from home for a week or more at a time without announcing my intending departure previously, that I had never remembered the state of mind my people would be in when they found we were not forthcoming. They would learn that the *Sheila* had disappeared, and when we failed to turn up they would naturally suppose we had come to grief in her, and so accept our deaths as certain.

It would do no good to tell this to burly Captain Macadam, as it was utterly out of his power to send us back then; so when he came up and congratulated us on looking so fit after what we had gone through, we simply held our tongues about the state of affairs at home; and as apparently it never crossed his mind, the matter was not alluded to.

The captain was very full of his enterprise and was constantly giving us details of it. Said he:

"There wasn't much trouble in smuggling the stuff aboard at Liverpool. 'Tisn't like a foreign port. The customs folk are spry enough when there's need for it, but they don't go pokin' their noses into everything just for the mere annoyance of the thing. Besides, there were plenty of five-pound notes throwing about, and I won't say but what some of 'em were used as spectacles. And a chap who's on two pound ten a week can't see much through a piece of paper

of that kind. Be that as it may, though, we got our clearance all right, but as word was given me at the last minute to keep my weather eye well skinned and look out for squalls, I guessed the gaff had been blown somewhere.

“Sure enough, soon after we’d dropped our pilot, out pops a steamer from behind the Skerries. It was a bit thick, and I couldn’t make her out at first, but I took a squint through the glass and saw the white ensign and twigged she was a gunboat. Hullo, thinks I, this is likely to be a mess if we don’t take care; so I ordered the engine-room hatches to be clapped on and battened down, and sung out down the tube to the engineer to use forced draught and drive every pound of steam into her he could get.

“We were standing along easily then, so as just to clear Holyhead, before bearing away more to s’uth’ard for the Tuskar Rock; and the gunboat was going on at half-steam athwart our course, so as to cut us off. Thought he’d do it, too, her skipper, I dare lay something. But there wasn’t any flies on me just then. The steam-gauge was goin’ up by jumps, and I was only holding back so as to save up for the first spurt.

“Then the time came, and I ported me hellum and sent her along for the Calf of Man at a pace that would well-nigh knock you off the bridge. She regularly hissed through it, the beauty; and that towing log on the taffrail theremarked a good deal better than eighteen knots. The gunboat was sloppy, I give him credit.

There was sparks coming out of his funnels the moment he saw what we were up to, and I'm not at all sure we'd have had the heels of him if it came to a long race. But luck favoured us. We'd got a healthy start, and off the Isle of Man we ran into a fog. He expected we'd cut out through the North Channel, and I don't doubt hoped to drop on us there. But curiously enough he didn't, 'cause the *Lynx* didn't go that way. When the fog was over her, she just doubled round the Man, came down the other side, and went south again on just a point or two to east'ard of her old course. And that I take it is all the bother her Britannic Majesty's cruisers are likely to favour us with."

"Then you expect to get into port without further trouble?" asked Bathurst.

"I hope to," replied the captain, pulling at his beard. "But I can't say I expect it. Ye see, the cat's out of the bag at Liverpool evidently, and the Chilian agent there will certainly have cabled the news across, and they'll have some of their cruisers on the look-out for us."

"But surely the neutral flag will protect us," I said.

"Not when we're carrying contraband of war, Mr. Musgrave," returned the captain. "Ye see, they naturally don't want the Peruvians to get the cargo, and besides that, I've no doubt they'd very much like to finger it themselves. But the ocean's a large place, and as I'm not exactly going to hug the shore—don't

intend to sight it, in fact, till I stand in for my port—the *Lynx* won't be so particularly easy to find. You can bet I'm going to do all I know not to get nabbed. I've got too much at stake to throw away any precautions. So's every man on board, for that matter. I don't suppose those Chilians would handcuff us with roses if they did contrive to lay hands on us. I'm sorry for you two, and I'd speak some passing ship if we saw one, or put you ashore somewhere if it could be managed. But it can't be done at the price. And anyway, you are better off here than you were on that *B. James Brock*."

"Are you going to mount your big guns on deck, captain, when you get into dangerous waters?" I asked.

"No, Mr. Musgrave, no; that 'ud be hardly good enough. It would be rank piracy and nothing less, and that's a hanging matter if anyone can lay hands on you. But all the same, I shouldn't be surprised if some of the stuff stays on the *Lynx* after all. You see, the Peruvians may want her, and I've instructions to sell if they'll agree to our figure. That's a pretty tall one, let me tell you, but she's worth the money to them if they want a fast unprotected cruiser. You see, she was built under special survey with a view to this, as a great many merchant steamers are nowadays from the big Atlantic liners downwards, and is specially strengthened in the places where a strain comes from having heavy guns mounted. In fact, if they put their backs into the work, they could get her ready to

receive her batteries in a week or ten days at the outside.

"We shouldn't of necessity find ourselves adrift either, if they did take her into the service. There'll be plenty of commissions throwing about, and as they have the good sense to prefer Englishmen to their own country folk, we on board here can be sure of first pick. In fact, I might as well own up to you that, if the war hasn't come to an end by the time we get out there, the bargain's as good as made. The general there," he continued, pointing with his thumb to the agent of the Peruvian government who was strutting up and down the other side of the deck—"The general there has as good as told me I can remain in command if I like, and can pick my own officers and crew. My own decision is made. I've sailed the *Lynx* for three years now, and know her so well that I rather think I could fight her as well as anyone, and perhaps a wee bit better. Ye see, I've been in the Naval Reserve some fourteen years, and know something about drill and gunnery and all that. And so if the chance comes, I'm going to stay where I am. The chief officer says he won't. He's a married man with children, and he's not going to get his head blown off if he knows it. The second mate's in the same boat; so that means two vacant berths. The engineers are all game to stick to the ship, and so are most of the petty officers and men forward. But you see, although we're heavily manned as it is, they'll have to draft a

lot more hands on board to get us up to a fighting strength."

And so on. Captain Macadam was very much in love with the idea of converting the *Lynx* into a properly-equipped war-vessel, with himself in command. He was a bachelor without ties; enjoyed his existence thoroughly; and though by no means reckless, did not put an exorbitant value on his life. His greatest ambition was to command in a naval action, a wish which, in these days of general peace, seemed to stand but little chance of being gratified. But here an unexpected chance was thrown into his way, and he was disposed to make the most of it. He would have preferred to fight under his own flag; but failing that, the first that accepted his sword was the one he would blythely serve.

The skipper's martial ardour progressed as the voyage wore on. Sailors are proverbially a restless race, and don't care for idleness. Being very heavily manned, there was light work for all hands, and the tedium of a long voyage began to make itself felt. So when, soon after passing the equator, Captain Macadam called for volunteers to be drilled, all hands stepped forward without a single exception, and thereafter drill went on every day, Sundays alone omitted.

The nominal object of these exercises was to prepare men for her Britannic Majesty's Naval Reserve, but although the subject had not been broached officially, it was pretty tolerably known both forward and aft

what the real object was. Indeed, a number of cutlasses and revolvers and rifles were served out from the cargo—with General Andarrez's permission, I presume—for it could not very well have been supposed that the Empress-Queen would wittingly borrow arms from a little Spanish-American republic. But, as I say, the little fiction was kept up; and the sailors, who had got what they wanted, to wit occupation, asked no inconvenient questions.

Bathurst and I had two or three pretty tough reviews of the subject before we coincided with the worthy Macadam's views. We had given up the idea that it was a necessity to carry the news of our safety home in person. The British consul would work that for us, and if a cablegram was impossible, he would see that a letter was forwarded home with reasonable despatch. So our relatives would receive a message as quickly as we could deliver it ourselves, or even more quickly. But the idea of fighting for a state we neither knew nor cared anything about came to us rather queerly. It amounted to becoming soldiers of fortune, and warriors of that stamp are rather an anachronism at this end of the nineteenth century. Besides, if we fought as English subjects, we might very well be hanged if the enemy caught us red-handed; and to take the safe course, and become naturalized Peruvians, was what neither of us had any intention of doing. We were too well satisfied with our nationality to have any wish to change it.

But, in spite of these drawbacks, the bait was a very alluring one. We were young, and youth is fond of excitement and adventure. And we had both wanted to go into the British army, but had had our wishes overruled for reasons which need not be detailed here.

"There is the opportunity of seeing active service now before us," said Bathurst, "and it's five hundred to one if the chance occurs again."

"I never fancied being a marine, Walter."

"Nor I. Heavy cavalry was my ambition if it could have been managed. However, the only difference is that one will have a steamer to fight on now, instead of a horse; and I'm not at all sure that the exchange isn't an advantageous one. Besides, men-of-war's men are often told off for skirmishing ashore, and that means variety. But no one ever heard of a troop of cavalry sent to help in a naval engagement. Horse marine is, so far as my desultory reading of Captain Marryatt serves me, merely a term of derision."

"Your last notion is an ingenious one," said I, laughing. "However, I'll tell you an argument for falling in with Macadam's ideas that we both seem to have forgotten. How much money have you?"

"Two shillings exactly."

"And I'm the proud possessor of fourpence ha'penny. Now fortunes, if we may believe what many millionaires say, have sprung from slighter foundations. But I don't think we need calculate on our capital swelling to any abnormal size in Peru just at present. They

are too busy breaking people's heads to allow money-making to go on. But what I'm thinking of is this. How should we manage ashore without money? Trade is at a stand-still. The nation is a vast army. We are not likely to run up credit anywhere, and without money we should either starve or be forced into military or naval service. We might work a loan on board here, but, considering the state of everything, it is doubtful, and I shouldn't care to run the risk of being refused. Besides, seeing how kind they have been to us already, I don't think it would be right to trespass on their generosity any further, especially as our only object in doing so would be to run counter to the skipper's obvious wishes."

"By Jove, Walter, you've hit an important nail on the head this time. I'm afraid we're booked for it whether we like it or not; and, to tell the truth, I'm not very sorry to have that decision made for me. I don't think I'm a weak-minded sort of chap as a general thing, but this is rather a large order, and one naturally hesitated before taking a step which might lead to very ugly consequences. However, it isn't all over but the signing an agreement yet. I suppose it's on the cards still that the Peruvian government may not buy the *Lynx* at all. They mayn't think she's suitable for their naval service, or, what's far more likely still, the war may have come to a conclusion by the time we make our landfall. So we are on the hither side of the Rubicon still. But for all that we may as well parade

on deck with the rest and go through our drill. It will be something to do; it won't do us any harm to learn it, and the skipper will be pleased."

CHAPTER VII

THE BLOCKADE.

THOUGH Captain Macadam kept a most liberal table, and our creature comforts were well attended to in that way, still the tedium of the long voyage made itself felt very heavily. Day after day we saw the same vista of seascape, smooth or rugged as the case might be, but never spotted by another vessel besides our own, and never bounded by the least trace of land. Night after night we ploughed our way along, watching the crests of the waves all tipped with flame, and the wake a seething mass of phosphorescence; gazing at the Southern Cross hung low in the star-sown sky, but wishing for the greater brilliance of that Great Bear we were accustomed to look up to at home.

What with lunars, stellars, and other observations, with compass, towing-log, and perfect chronometers, navigation has reached such a pitch of perfection nowadays that a skilled sailor can be perfectly certain of his whereabouts on the longest voyage, without making a landfall to test his figures with. And so we

held on our way across the equator, through the South Atlantic, and away far south of the icy Horn and round into the mild Pacific, without sighting either ship or shore.

On all days when the weather would permit of it the men were paraded and drilled; we exercised at single-stick, and a couple of pairs of boxing-gloves which happened to be on board were in constant requisition.

But as I have said time dragged very slowly, and no one on board was sorry when we got to within a hundred and thirty miles of Callao, our port. I mention this distance because it was then that the steamer was brought to a stand-still, hove to under after-canvas, whilst her engines received a thorough overhaul. The *Lynx* was only a few years old, and all her machinery was of the best; but there was perhaps a heavy ordeal on ahead, and Captain Macadam was not the man to neglect the smallest precaution which would ensure success. So he ordered this thorough overhaul, which could not very well be gone through when the great engines were running, and told the engineers they might take two days if they liked, but he must have the job done thoroughly.

For a while, therefore, every part of the engine-room was alive with greasy, grimy men. They were down in the bowels of the ship, where the huge cranks were wont to skim within a few inches of the keelson; they were here, there, and everywhere. They repacked

the low-pressure cylinder of the after-port engine; they put fresh nuts on the band of an eccentric-rod which had worked a trifle loose; and all the boilers had their fires withdrawn, their manholes unbolted, and their cavernous depths thoroughly cleansed.

The work was done with thoroughness; but as all available hands set to with a will, it was got through with great expedition, and fourteen hours after commencing the overhaul, steam was blowing off under a pressure of eighty pounds.

The engine-room telegraphs rung round to three-quarters speed ahead, and the course was set straight in to our port. The hatches to the stokehold were shipped and battened tightly down, and the furnaces were supplied with air by a forced draught.

The *Lynx* was gliding over the gentle Pacific swell at a rate of about fifteen knots an hour. The ocean was still deserted, and there was no land yet in sight; so, as there was no occasion for racing pace, the captain was keeping the remainder of his speed in reserve. The entrance to the port would probably be patrolled by the enemy's cruisers, but we hoped to run their blockade safely during the hours of darkness and be snugly under the heavy guns of the harbour redoubt before day broke. From the average of twenty careful observations on the previous mid-day Macadam knew his position to a quarter of a mile, and, being thoroughly acquainted with the coast, said he could tell to half a minute when he would come into sound-

ings. The moon would be in its first quarter and would set early, and the night promised to be an extremely dark one. Under ordinary circumstances a vessel would have hove to off the mouth of the harbour till daylight and then signalled for a pilot, for the entrance was both intricate and dangerous. But these were extraordinary circumstances, and it was out of the question to follow the usual custom. However, Macadam was pretty confident that he could con his vessel through the channel between the spit and the island in safety. At any rate he fully intended to make the attempt, and so we on board were in for running the gauntlet whether we liked it or not.

Except for the stokers and engineers, whose posts were below, all hands were on deck, far too excited to turn in. The run would take about six and a half hours at the pace we were going, and less, of course, if the speed were increased. But if the draught which fanned the furnaces was put on to a greater pressure, there would be streams of fire pouring from the funnels which would herald our approach ten miles off. As it was the steamer was enveloped in darkness. Her side and masthead lights were not in place; there was a tarpaulin on the engine-room skylight; the lamps in the cabins were all unlit; and the binnacle lamps in the wheel-house were carefully housed over, so that they should not show a gleam except on the compass-card.

The *Lynx* sped along her course so darkly and silently that the look-outs on another vessel five hun-

dred yards off might well have let her slip by unnoticed, however sharp their eyesight. We on board could hear the muttered thunder of her machinery, the faint grating of the screw-shafts far away down in their tunnel, and the swish of the seas from stem to wake; but the wind was ahead, and these sounds would not be audible for more than a cable's-length¹ on either beam.

We had run to within twenty miles of the coast, and by daylight the higher peaks of the inland mountain chains would have been plainly visible. Now our view was circumscribed by a wall of velvety blackness which hemmed us closely in on every side; but Captain Macadam held on unhesitatingly along a course that was guided by compass and told off by towing-log alone. An old Scots quartermaster, the best steersman on board, held the spokes of the steam steering-wheel, and kept his ferret eyes glued on the card of the liquid compass. Deviations were reported from the standard compass forward every half-minute. The towing-log was trailing over the taffrail, and its indicator was constantly watched by the chief officer. The six best pair of eyes were on the look-out on the fore-deck; there were a couple more men on the fore-topgallant yard, and still another on the foreyard. The captain was pacing the bridge anxiously enough, but with every sense on the alert, and two other officers were with him ready for any emergency. Every night-glass in the ship was searching the darkness.

¹ Cable's-length=100 fathoms=200 yards.

But it was from the Peruvian shore rather than from a Chilian war-vessel whence seemed to me just then to impend our chiefest danger. The wind was easterly, it is true, with a few points of south in it—I forget the exact direction now—but even under those most favourable circumstances there would be a surf running on the island and the sandy spit which bounded the entrance to Callao harbour that would quickly break the *Lynx* up if she stuck.

Bathurst and I were in the foretop, a position which we had taken up at the beginning of the run. The third mate had laughingly told us that although we might be blessed with good eyesight, we could not see half as far through a dark night as men who had been trained to doing it by years and years of practice. But as we could have been of no use elsewhere, and as we were far too much worked up by the situation to spend the time idly if it could be avoided, we perched ourselves up there and peered into the blackness ahead unremittingly.

My watch, despite the rough treatment it had received, was still in going order, and a glance at it occasionally, and a knowledge of the pace at which we were proceeding, told us roughly our whereabouts. I had just taken a look at the dial, and announced that we were about twenty miles off shore, when a blinding glare of light streamed out of the darkness ahead and covered the *Lynx* in a flood of radiance. For a full minute my eyes were too dazzled to make out what

had happened. Then, being accustomed to the glare, I made out the long black hull of a steamer lying right athwart of our track. She was in too much darkness to make her out with any degree of clearness, but beyond doubt she was a Chilian war-vessel, and hearing our approach had flashed out her searchlight to make sure of who we were.

As I looked the *Lynx's* bow sheered off to starboard, while she rushed on to pass beneath the stranger's stern under a full head of steam; and glancing aft I saw volumes of dull red flame pouring from our funnels, which told plainly what was going on in the stokeholds.

The stranger's screw began to revolve and she bore off on a course which would be parallel to our own; but her turning circle was a large one, and by the time she had completed it we were half a mile apart. No hails had passed between the vessels, but the man-of-war blazed off a couple of heavy guns as an obvious hint for us to heave to. These were of blank cartridge, and as the *Lynx* ignored them utterly, shot followed, accompanied by a heavy rifle fire.

The order came for all hands except those on duty to get below under cover. Bathurst and I were not exactly officially stationed in the top, and although we had no objection to removing our valuable skins from a position where we were tempting cock-shies for ambitious marksmen, we had a strong dislike to the idea of bottling ourselves up in comparative quietude

below. So we compromised matters by getting under the lee of the protecting bulwark forward, where the skipper was too much occupied with other matters to notice and send us away.

Meanwhile every ounce of steam that human efforts could raise was being crammed into the boilers, and the whole fabric of the steamer trembled to the vibration of the superheated furnaces, and rattled to the mad plunging of the engines. The *Lynx* was tearing through the waters as fast as she had gone over her first measured mile on the Clyde, or even faster. It was a case of neck or nothing, and the chief engineer was not the man to hold anything in reserve through timidity at a moment like that.

The *Lynx* had swung back on to her old course again and was heading dead in for the port. The gunboat was being dropped behind with every revolution of the screws. She had to fall off every time she fired any of her big guns, and so lost more ground. Her gunners were not up to their work, and never managed to hit us once, though of course the mark presented by our narrow stern was but a small one. She gave it to us pretty hotly, though, with rifles and machine-guns, and our upper works were well riddled. But a redoubt of coal-bags had been built round the after end of the wheel-house; and the three officers on the bridge, who were the only ones of the ship's company left exposed, escaped without being hit.

Soon after the raking fire commenced Bathurst and

I changed our quarters. The ping of bullets all around, the whistling of them through the air, and the zip they made when woodwork came athwart their flight, made me feel mighty uncomfortable. But I wasn't going to make a bolt for it till someone else gave a lead. However, the men stationed on the fore-deck seemed to think that they would be safer elsewhere, and when they rushed in a body to the lee of the wheel-house I joined them. Bathurst came too, though he didn't deign to hurry himself, but sauntered up with his hands in his pockets, which was a piece of foolery I didn't see any particular object in.

"Quite an exciting adventure, Frank," said he; "something to yarn about when we get home."

"If we ever get there," I replied.

"Why, bless the chap, if that beggar couldn't hit us at short range, it isn't likely that his shooting will improve now. He can't stop us with a rifle fire, and there doesn't seem much chance of his sending a heavy shot into any place where it will do us much harm."

"Mr. Bathurst's right," said one of the men. "We've got a straight run in now, and if the old man don't manage to pick up a reef when he's makin' the 'arbour, we'll be snugly moored in forty minutes' time from now, I take it."

"Don't you crow, Bill, afore you're hout o' the wood," growled another. "We hain't there yet—no, not by a long chalk."

"Belay that jaw there!" said the third mate, who

was with us. "Your precious hide is safe enough this trip, Peter.—Hullo! what, in thunder— Bridge there! D'ye see them rockets that chap astern's sendin' up, sir?"

"Ay, ay," returned the captain.

"What are they for?" I asked the mate after a minute's silence.

"Signalling some consort further inshore, I'm afraid," said he; and scarcely were the words out of his mouth when another stream of electric light poured out of the darkness ahead of us, and after sweeping slowly round for a moment or so, settled on the *Lynx*, making everything as bright as mid-day.

I looked up at the bridge. The captain was stamping with vexation. Till a moment ago the course had seemed clear to him, and now it was unmistakably barred by another war-ship—or perhaps by more—that there was no possibility of steaming round. With the former vessel pressing hard on our stern, and with this other only two miles away, to go on as we were was madness. One or other of them must get us under their batteries, and if we still refused to heave to we should inevitably be fired into and sunk.

But though there was no chance of making his port just then, Captain Macadam had no intention of allowing the *Lynx* to be captured if he knew it. He issued an order, and directly afterwards the steam steering gear rattled, and we knew what it was. The helm had been shoved over hard a-port. The steamer

swung round with both screws still going full ahead, and soon she was running almost due south with all the speed she could muster.

CHAPTER VIII

CHASED.

THIS looks remarkably like running away," Bathurst observed, as the *Lynx* sped off on her new course.

"We may thank our stars if our heels are nimble enough to take us clear," said I.

"It means gaol at the best if we do get nabbed," growled the seaman Peter, a rough squat old fellow with a face like a moist walnut-shell. "I bin in a Spanish-Yankee limbo once. Finished up a spell ashore that way. Got clapped into a 'ole foul and filthy enough to make a pig sick, an' all for gettin' on the spree a bit an' puttin' up me 'ands at a cove that lurched agin me a-purpose. An' I don't want to get there again neither. Not that we'd be as heasy let off as I was then. This'll be a 'anging job, or something very near it."

"Silence there, men!" called the third mate. "And you, Peter, if you're afraid, go below."

The man spat on the deck, and relapsed into inarticulate grumblings, and the mate took up the tale.

"I don't deny," he said, "but what there might be an awkward mess if either of them infernal meddlesome men-o'-war could manage to bring us to, and take a squint at the stuff we've got stowed away under hatches. But they can't, and so that's an end of the matter. What we'll do next, I can't say. We're bound to run the cargo somewhere, and as it's contraband we're well-nigh certain to have a bit o' trouble. But all hands knew that before they signed on, and therefore there needn't be any grumblin'. There is risk, but then we're paid accordin'ly."

"'Ear 'ear," said another man, and then there was silence again, broken only by the din of the engines and the rattle of the ship's fabric as she trembled under the mighty impulses which drove her so furiously along. The two war-ships were on either beam, their courses gradually converging on ours; and although the one inshore was the further off of the two at the commencement of the race, it was evident that she was faster than her companion.

Both the men-of-war were lit up from stem to stern, and they kept their search-lights turned full on to us. Each plied one broadside battery with unremitting vigour; and the inshore vessel, which carried a heavy gun in a forward turret, every now and then sent a projectile at us that might well have sunk us at once if it had reached its mark—which it never did. Their other artillery was lighter, and their marksmanship shockingly bad; but for all that they hit us every now

and then, and did a considerable amount of damage. One shot had torn through the iron plating on the starboard quarter as though it had been so much paper, smashed through a state-room, crumpled up the saloon table, bored its way through a nest of lockers in the opposite state-room, and popped out through the ship's skin again into the sea. Another lucky hit had been made in the after smoke-stack, a yard above the deck. The mizzenmast, struck by two shots in almost exactly the same place, had parted a couple of fathoms below the jaws of the gaff, and toppling overboard had been cut adrift. And the bulwarks had been splintered in a dozen places. But the elevation seemed for the most part too high, and the marksmanship, as I have said, uniformly bad. Perhaps the swell had something to do with it, for there was a fair sea running at the time.

Considering the heavy and unremitting fire—for smaller bullets were whistling about our ears in lavish plenty all the time—considering the heavy fire, the casualties amongst the crew were very few. A steward who was snugly down below got some nasty cuts from broken glass when the cabin table went to smash, and the squat wrinkled-faced seaman Peter received a pretty shrewd splinter-wound on the left forearm, which he exhibited with many “I-told-you-so’s” before going below to get someone to tie it up.

That we had the heels of our first enemy was clear, for before the combined chase had lasted an hour we

had got her hull down. But although the other beggar couldn't overhaul us, we couldn't shake him off. In fact our respective speeds were just about equal. If any part of the machinery got heated or went wrong in any way, we should fall into his clutches at once; and considering the high rate of speed we were keeping up there was a distinct probability that, in spite of the energy and care of the engineers and their staff of greasers, something might go wrong. The contract speed of the *Lynx* was up to eighteen knots, but it was not intended by the builders of either vessel or engines that such a pace should be maintained; and here she was being pressed along at a continuous rate that showed half a knot faster than that. Of course, on the other hand, the pestilential war-ship might come to grief in similar fashion; but that couldn't, of course, be reckoned upon. Still on that point, in view of our overhaul on the previous day, the odds were slightly in our favour.

It was not very long before number one dropped out of range, and although number two couldn't see whether her missiles hit or not, she kept her gun crews steadily employed on the off chance. Their practice was best with the broadside battery, which was rapidly if not very accurately served. The guns were rifled 4-inch breech-loaders. There were four of them, and they contrived to hull us occasionally, and to knock the superstructure about cruelly. One lucky shot—lucky for them, that is—carried away three stanchions, and

brought the bridge down by the run. But the captain and his two mates gained the deck undamaged, and so we were not materially the worse for that, save for the engine-room telegraphs being all thrown out of gear. However, the speaking-tube though bent was not broken, and this was quite sufficient to keep up an easy communication with the chief engineer.

They were firing conical shot the whole time, and why they didn't honour us with shell we couldn't at first imagine. With it they could have done ten times the damage, and as that must have been as obvious to themselves as to us, we could only conclude that, like the Romans before Jerusalem, they hadn't got any. However, the dose of solid missiles more than satisfied us, for this one-sided fight was growing rather sickening. It's all right if you're able to fire back. You get excited then and don't mind. But to stand with your hands helplessly in your pockets whilst a modern man-of-war blazes away at you is very poor fun indeed.

During the hour immediately preceding daybreak it grew darker. We were gradually managing to draw away from our pursuer. At length we drew beyond the range of his broadside battery and small-arms, and began to congratulate ourselves on getting clear. He kept up the fire with the heavy gun in the forward turret, blazing away with it about every six or seven minutes. We would see a great flash, standing out red and lurid against the bluey-white background of gray smoke and glaring electric lights, and then the

great projectile would plunge into the sea perhaps a quarter of a mile from us and ricochet away into the distance, throwing up a spout of water from every point it touched. And then a full minute afterwards we would hear the sullen boom of the report as it was wafted to us across the intervening swells. We were beginning to have a very profound contempt for that piece of heavy ordnance.

However, our confidence was destined to receive a rather rude shock. Whether it happened by accident or whether some new and cleverer hand trained the gun I know not, but of a sudden the *Lynx* was dealt a blow which forced her almost on to her starboard beam-ends. Almost everyone was bowled off his legs by the jar, but by the time we had scrambled up again the steamer had recovered herself and was tearing along her course as before.

The third mate from the fore-deck came running up to the captain with a report.

"Gone slap through," I heard him say. "Cut away all the stem-head, and crumpled up the bow plates just 's if they'd been so much sheet-tin." Then in answer to a question he added, "No, it's all well above water-line. She's as good as a new tea-pot below."

"Very well," said the captain, "get a tarpaulin over the gash and make it as snug as you can. I don't expect we shall be having any more bother after this. We're about at the end of that fellow's tether now, and we're leaving him. I've been measuring the distance

with a sextant every few minutes, and for the last quarter of an hour we've been creeping away hand over fist. He's got a heated bearing somewhere or other I expect, and has had to slow down.—Hullo, Musgrave, what business have you on deck? Didn't I order you to get out of harm's way? However, as you are here, slip below and bring me the engineer's report, and tell him that if he can get this knottage out of her for another half-hour we shall be out of range, and then he can slow down a bit and get his wind again."

I went below as I was bidden, pushed open the engine-room door, which could hardly open against the fierce pressure of air inside, and stepped through, letting it slam after me.

At first I could hardly breathe. Despite the forced draught of fresh air pumped in from outside, the atmosphere seemed to consist of little else but hot oily steam, through which the incandescent electric lamps beamed but dimly. Grimy half-naked men were flitting about through the broiling mist, oil-can in one hand, reeking slush-lamp in the other. In the distance below, white-hot furnaces and red-hot furnace-doors gleamed both fore and aft. Above the thud of the frantic machinery and the roar of the flues was the clatter of coals as the trimmers hurled the dusty blocks from the bunkers and the stokers shovelled them on to the fires. All was dust, oleaginous vapour, deafening noise, orderly confusion.

Passing down a slippery polished iron ladder I reached a small railed-in platform perched amongst the machinery. Here, with all the governing powers of the vast machine close to hand, stood Ferguson, the chief engineer. He was stripped to vest, breeches and shoes, and was filthy with oily dust and perspiration. He welcomed me with a half-smile and a short nod, and then turned to bawl out some order to one of his staff. I knew nothing about engines then, but the sight of the huge cranks pelting round like those of a locomotive, and the fierce feverish thrusting and circling on every side was enough to hint to the most ignorant person in the world what strict care was needful to prevent anything going wrong.

The little platform on which we were perched, besides swaying with the motion of the vessel, trembled and shook to such an extent from the straining forces around it, that for a while I was regularly dizzy, and could only retain my footing by clinging to the light guard-rail which surrounded it; but that feeling wore off in a minute or so, and when Ferguson had a moment's leisure to speak to me, I had got more or less used to the situation.

I gave him the captain's message.

"Well," said he, "the sooner I get the word to slow down a bit the sooner I'll be pleased. It's pretty stiff work to keep her running at this pace, I can tell you. Just look at that dial and see the number of revolutions we're making per minute. That's nearly double

our ordinary number. All things considered she's been behaving splendidly so far; but it don't do, Mr. Musgrave, to work a willing horse to death. You see that steam down below there?—No, port side. Yes, there, by the shaft. Well, that's coming up from an eccentric band that's trying hard to fuse on to its disc. It's one we tightened up a trifle yesterday, and the friction's a bit too great. Half a turn too much of the nuts did it; but of course we can't remedy that without stopping now. You can't see 'em for the steam, but there's my second with a crew of half a dozen men with him down there doing all they know for it, and the plaguy thing's just about keeping their hands full."

"Then what am I to tell the captain?"

"Tell him that if it's a case of neck or nothing, of course we'll risk it, but the odds are about even on a smash if we stick to it much longer, and that'll not only mean men killed, but a general hash-up of everything down below here as well."

Furnished with this ominous message I regained the deck, and repeated my news to Macadam. He received the tidings coolly enough, and indeed seemed quite relieved to learn that matters were no worse. "I'll let her have it all for a quarter of an hour more," he said, "and that should take us clear of that lumbering big turret-gun, and then we'll slow down and just keep our distance."

The dawn was just breaking when I came on deck.

The enemy lay on our port quarter some four miles away, and the officers, who were constantly measuring the angle subtended by her masts with their sextants, were confident that we were drawing away from her with increasing rapidity.

She was hull down, and at Bathurst's suggestion he and I, after furnishing ourselves with a pair of glasses, went into the foretop to have a look at her. We rose her water-line from that elevation, and through the binoculars could see her perfectly. Contrasting her with our own scared and dilapidated condition, which showed very plain evidences of the ordeal to which we had been subjected, she looked very spick and span indeed. She was painted white all over, and the grim black muzzle of her guns stood out against the prevailing colour in bold relief. She was blowing off steam in dense fleecy clouds, and so we judged that some defect had shown itself in her engines, which had obliged them to be slackened down.

The war-ship was not remarkably beautiful from a sailor's point of view, but there was an air of strength and solidity about her that seemed to hint that she would be a very ugly customer to tackle.

I mentioned this last idea to Bathurst, who had been grumbling energetically at the stern necessity which made us trust to our heels alone, and set him going afresh.

"I can understand Macadam's feelings now, Frank," he said, "and I'm coming to share them. I declare to

you I'd give everything I possess if the *Lynx* had got her armament and commission, and we were able to engage that fellow instead of bolting from him like a pack of involuntary cowards. Look, there go her colours up to the peak! Ah, the skipper's seen it, and up runs our red ensign to the main-mast head, where it'll be well seen. Well, it isn't often disgraced like this."

"I don't see where the disgrace comes in, Walter. In the old days of wooden vessels, when everybody carried heavy guns, it might have been a different matter; but at this end of the nineteenth century for an unarmed merchant steamer to go into action with a man-of-war, whatever she may be like, would be simple madness. Even if we'd got some of those rifles and things up on deck, we wouldn't have done any good with them, except to make sure of getting hung as pirates if we didn't get shot before we were caught. Let me tell you, we're jolly well out of it."

Bathurst's eyes were glued to his binocular, and he made no immediate answer to this harangue except to utter a prolonged whistle.

"What's the matter now?" I asked him.

"I don't think we are out of the wood yet. I may be mistaken, but it strikes me that ugly chap over there to windward has another trump left in his hand yet."

"I wish you'd talk plain English, Walter," said I.

"Just take a squint, my good Frank, and tell me if you see nothing on that fellow's weather quarter."

I peered through the glasses, but could see nothing. Bathurst looked again. "It's out of sight now," he muttered, "but I'll take my oath I saw it plainly enough just now."

"What are you wandering about, Walter?"

"Wait a minute," said he, "I'm going further aloft." And without further explanation he slung the glasses at his back, ran up the ratlines, and coming to a halt on the topgallant yard, wedged himself in behind the slings, and made another keen scrutiny. Curious to know what was to do I joined him.

"Well?" said I.

"Well, Frank, I wasn't mistaken after all. There's one of those long fast torpedo-boats steaming along under her weather quarter. Here, take the glasses and you'll see her when she rises on a swell. Now that chap'll be able to do his twenty-two or twenty-three knots an hour without a particle of trouble. Those craft are just built for speed and nothing else. You mark my words. When the big ship finds we're drawing away, she'll slip the leash, and we shall have that greyhound racing after us, and coming up hand over fist. She hasn't done it before because she wanted to take us more or less undamaged, and a torpedo would probably sink the *Lynx* out of hand. But she'll have no possible doubt as to who we are now, and sooner than let us get away she'll risk a brawl with Great Britain, and send us to Davy Jones, crew, ship, and baggage."

"Then, if that's the case," said I, "we're in a nice hole. We haven't a boat left that will swim, and if the ship does go down, I expect they'll think that dead men tell no tales, and leave us to our own devices. These Spanish Americans have a good many pleasant notions of that kind, so I've gathered from what that fierce little animal Andarrez has let drop. His countrymen and their enemies seem to be more like wild beasts in their ways of fighting than men."

"Well, we aren't killed yet," said Bathurst complacently, "so let's go and report what we've seen to the skipper, and then get below and have some breakfast. I'm half famished."

CHAPTER IX.

A TORPEDO-BOAT.

IF you think a meal is going to be your last, that is no particular reason why it should not be a good one. There is no special advantage that I know of in being drowned or shot on an empty stomach. We were both remarkably hungry, and both made very extensive breakfasts that morning. We didn't hurry ourselves in the least. There was nothing much to be done or seen on deck, and it was quite half an hour before we returned there.

Sure enough Walter's prognostication had come true.

The big war-ship had despatched her smaller and speedier consort on our trail, and the latter was coming up speedily.

It was of no use to endeavour to escape from this new enemy by speed; so our engines, which had been slowed down to sixteen and a half knots, were not quickened again. But the greatest head of steam that the boilers would stand was kept up ready for emergencies, and it was blowing off at the highest pressure Ferguson dared screw his valves down to.

With her mizzen-mast gone a dozen yards above the deck, her bulwarks riddled, her skylights splintered, and her nose broken off, the *Lynx* showed, as I have said, plenty of evidences of the metallic hail-storm with which she had been pelted. What little could be done in the way of repairing the wreck her crew were doing, but beyond rigging up the bridge again, there was not much that could be effected in a short space of time. But Macadam was perched on his old place again, with engine-room telegraphs and speaking-tube each in full working order once more, so that he possessed all his usual appliances, and had the ship under perfect command.

The captain did not intend to let his vessel play the part of whale whilst this thresher came up and worked its wicked will without being resisted. He had enacted that passive part already much longer than suited his taste; but when he saw that a cold-blooded attempt was going to be made to send his

ship with all her complement to the bottom rather than let her get away, then he determined to change his tactics.

"I know I'm violating international law," he said, "by carrying contraband of war, and I'll own that big fellow over there was quite within his rights when he was trying to bring me to. But when he deliberately sets about sending the whole gang of us, ship and all, to Davy Jones if we don't surrender, well, there he gets to an end of my patience, and I shall resist for all I'm worth, and sink that torpedo-boat if I can manage it. I'd do it on my own responsibility; but, as it is, the general here has formally taken the *Lynx* and her crew over into the Peruvian service, so those who refuse to join have full permission to leave the ship by any means they like."

This harangue was delivered before every member of the crew who could be spared from duty, and there was a laugh from one or two quarters at the offer to leave the steamer there and then—an offer which, needless to remark, it was impossible to accept unless one wished for a tolerably lengthy swim. Most of the men stepped forward at once and declared their willingness to fall in with the captain's views, but there were a few who held back, and from them came divers murmurings of the word "Surrender."

Macadam caught it up at once. "I shall surrender the *Lynx*," he said, "if I see no chance of her escaping; but if we can keep this torpedo-boat at a moderate

distance, there are a good many chances of her failing to hit us. She is armed with Whiteheads; she may have a brace, she certainly won't have more than two, and those of you who have been in the Royal Naval Reserve will know very well that those are not easy things with which to hit a vessel that is going at a high rate of speed. Besides, if they are launched from a distance, with our double screws we shall most probably be able to dodge them, as their track is clearly shown by the line of bubbles they leave on the surface. The only thing to fear is that the torpedo-boat may get too near us, in which case the Whitehead, which travels at nearly thirty knots an hour, would be on us before we could move out of its way, and that is why I propose getting up some of our cargo on deck, and putting it to the uses for which it was intended by the manufacturer."

The laggards stepped forward at this explanation, and became Peruvians without further and more formal enrolment. Then the British red ensign was hauled down from the mainmast-head, and the hatches to the holds whipped off.

I believe there were a good many people on board who thought that our proceedings favoured very strongly of latter-day piracy; but the excitement of the moment was getting intense, and as the large majority were all of one way of thinking, there was no open murmuring, and all hands worked with a will.

Whips were rove, the steam winches were set agoing,

and packing-case after packing-case was struck out of the holds. It was large-calibre machine-guns that were wanted; but as the cases hadn't got their contents specified on the outside, many were broken open and much valuable time was lost before we hit upon the weapons we required. However, four were got out at last, and mounted by the carpenters before ports in the bulwarks, which had been rudely cut with axes to receive their muzzles. A few cases of suitable ammunition were got up on deck and broken open, and hands were employed to fit the cartridges into the belts intended to receive them. And the rifles, which had been previously used for drill, were served out afresh, to see how theory would hold in the practice of actual warfare.

Meanwhile the long narrow torpedo-boat had been overhauling us rapidly. Her slender black hull wallowed over the waves, and very often through them, and her forward turtle-deck was almost constantly shaking off a heavy watery burden. She was what is technically known as a boat of the first class, and was a specimen of the most uncomfortable make of vessel, for anything except a short voyage, that mortal man's ingenuity has ever invented. Her rollings and plungings were something awful. She had been built for two things. Speed was the great desideratum. The smallest possible target for hostile missiles was the next. And to these two requirements everything else had been ruthlessly sacrificed. So small was her free-

board, that her narrow arched decks were continually being swept by the seas; and had not everything been firmly battened down fore and aft, she would inevitably have been swamped.

She raced up to us, and the black reek pouring out of her short stumpy smoke-stacks was the only sign of life about her. Not a man was visible on her gleaming decks. The lieutenant in command was in the conning-tower, hidden from our sight, and safe from our missiles, unless they could penetrate some six inches of steel-faced armour-plating. The governing power of every item of the venomous little craft was under his disposal. The other men on board would act as blind machines according to his telling. He could set his vessel with the steam steering-wheel, and then launch the torpedo from its under-water tube in the bows simply by finger-pressure on an electric switch. Theoretically it was a perfect machine for slaughter-on-the-large-scale-made-easy.

However, unlike these historical farm-yard animals which respond to the cry of "Ducky, ducky, come and be killed," we had no intention of stretching out our necks for the knife, if we knew it. Accordingly, when that same first-class torpedo-boat was about three-quarters of a mile off, we saluted her with such an infernal shower of lead, that she slackened down her engines for a minute, and appeared to consider. It was quite beyond her calculations that we should offer armed resistance, especially with large-calibre machine-

guns, and the warm reception probably astonished her not a little.

Some of the more sanguine spirits amongst us jumped to the hasty conclusion that, misliking this taste of our quality, the commander of the torpedo-boat would haul off directly and try conclusions no further. But the rest shrewdly suspected that he was just steadying down a bit to regain his wind—to get up a heavy head of steam, that is—and then would come on with a blinding rush.

The event proved this last conjecture to be a correct one. His multitubular boilers quickly ran up their gauges to the requisite pressure, and then the valves were opened again to the full, while forward she leaped between two regular slices of water, which shot up on either side of her narrow stem.

The shriek and rattle of our quick-firing artillery rang out afresh; but beyond making his smoke-stacks look as if they were made of wire-netting instead of solid iron plates, we seemed to do but little damage. The leaden bullets that we were firing were intended to work havoc against man. It was steel projectiles we needed to make any impression on the smooth, metal-bound hull and decks of the torpedo-boat, and of these we had none. Still the heavy fire had the effect of deterring our antagonist from coming to too close quarters, for he held away out on to our port beam, and, when five hundred yards away, rounded-to a trifle and discharged his first torpedo.

We saw by the silver stream of bubbles the track that the deadly engine of destruction was taking. Its course and the *Lynx's* would join if we kept on as we were going. But Captain Macadam was not quite foolish enough to stand on and let it intercept us. Prompt to take in the situation, he rung the engine-room telegraphs round; and whilst the port screw was kept going as before, the starboard engines were stopped, and then reversed at fullest steam. With helm ported hard at the same time, the *Lynx* swung round like a smart cutter in stays, and the cigar-shaped tube of steel, with its wondrous mechanism and its deadly charge of gun-cotton, shot harmlessly past, ran away a mile to leeward, leaped thirty feet into the air like some huge silver-scaled salmon, and then plashed back and floated harmlessly and quietly on the surface.

Meanwhile the torpedo-boat had not been idle. Steaming round on to our beam again, she discharged another missile; this time at closer quarters, and at a broader angle.

Had we attempted to double as before, beyond a doubt it would have picked us up. But both the engines were turned to full astern. For some seconds the way she had on her caused the *Lynx* to forge slowly ahead; but the retardation was sufficient, and again the ghastly missile sped away quietly athwart our bows.

Then round rung the telegraphs for both screws full ahead, and the captain shouted down the voice-tube to

emphasize his order. As though gored to madness by a pair of cruel spurs, the steamer fairly leaped through the water, and the helm being slightly starboarded, she made for that torpedo-boat at a pace that must have made the lieutenant in the conning-tower tremble.

"The skipper's taking to offensive measures with a vengeance now," muttered the third mate, who was beside me. "Paint me green if he isn't trying to run that fellow down. However, they deserve all they get, only we ain't got a regular ram sticking out under our bows, and if we're stove-in to the collision bulkhead we shall be out of the frying-pan into the fire with a vengeance, for she'll make very poor way with the fore compartment full of water, and that big chap astern will be able to pick us up at his leisure."

However, that contingency did not have to be met, as our stem remained intact. Despite her great length and narrow beam, the torpedo-boat's powerful rudders and twin screws enabled her to manœuvre so that we did not run her down; and although we came so close to one another that her stern projection which covered the screws actually scored a bright groove on our broadside as she sheered away, still we were unable to do her any material damage. Amid a tearing leaden hail she steamed away from us again, and then rounding-to, followed in a direct line almost in our wake.

As she had emptied both her torpedo-tubes, and, so we judged, had come to an end of her means of offence, the reason for this manœuvre was rather puzzling. How-

ever, Captain Macadam read it that our fire had damaged her somewhere, and whilst making it good she had run into a position where we could annoy her with neither shot nor stem. He was quite aware that our enemy was far too eel-like to allow herself to be rammed, and knew that it was impossible to dislodge her with either helm or screws, as all her movements were far handier than ours. But for all that he did not intend to let her hang where she was in peace.

So orders were given, and a couple of machine-guns, wrenched from the position in which they had been hurriedly spiked down on the broadside, were mounted astern, and opened out their infernal concert afresh from there.

The raking leaden hail swept the torpedo-boat's deck from stem to stern, and being delivered at point-blank range, planed them literally clear of everything except the conning-tower. But that resisted attack; and whilst it remained the mind of the wicked little craft was intact, and the deep scratches which disfigured the body were of little import. A shell from a four-inch gun, well aimed, would have sent her to the bottom without further ado; but although we had heavy artillery stowed deep in the holds, with carriages and all appurtenances, it was utterly out of the question to get even one piece mounted then.

So we kept the water-jackets of our machine-guns cool with perennial supplies, and made them belch

forth missiles at their highest rate of speed. If a sufficient number of impacts were made in one and the same place, surely, we thought, the shielding plates must crumble away.

But our efforts were suddenly and ruthlessly put a stop to. The torpedo-boat had, it seems, a third Whitehead in reserve—a fact which no one on board the *Lynx* ever thought of. She ran astern of us to gain time whilst emptying one of her torpedo-tubes of the water it contained, fitting in the fresh missile, and preparing for its departure. All this occupied but little time. Then with a rush she neared us, and shot her last projectile into the water at a hundred yards' range.

The pace of a Whitehead torpedo is thirty miles per hour; so you can calculate for yourself how long it took to reach us. The flashing line of bubbles told of its approach, and word was passed to the bridge. But human promptitude could do nothing to avert the impact.

It struck us. There was a roar, and the stern of the steamer soared high in the air amid a raging torrent of spray and green water. The crowd of men on the poop were tumbled forward in a confused and writhing mass. There was a bumping, tearing jar in the engine-room, and then a series of crashes which terminated in silence. Everyone on board knew that our last chance of escape had gone.

CHAPTER X.

CAPTURED.

THE *Lynx* settled down on the surface of the ocean again, forged slowly ahead till her former impulse died away, and then became motionless. Save for the steam which screamed shrilly and fiercely from the escape-pipes, she was an abode of silence. For the first minute, every soul on board of her was stunned morally or physically by the shock.

On deck there was little fresh damage to be seen. The two machine-guns had jerked themselves free from the heavy spike-nails with which they had been rudely held in place, and one had pitched through the main skylight into the saloon. But beyond that all was much the same as before.

Macadam was the first to collect his scattered senses; and his cheery, confident voice was heard bidding the officers make inspection, and then come and report on the damage.

They went their several ways, and one by one came back with their news. ✱

Ferguson was the first to bring ugly tidings. Half-clad, grimy, and perspiring, he presented himself on deck and made for the captain. I was near enough to hear his words.

"There's been a tidy smash down below, sir," he

said. "We felt a heavy shock, and then something seemed to jam the port screw. The engines stopped short on the turn; but before I could close the valve they had kicked on, and snap went the main shaft. The fracture must have been a diagonal one, for it's forced up all the bearings and played general havoc, twisting the connecting-rods as though they had been copper wire, and starting the packing from nearly every joint in the place. The starboard engines are half adrift from their bed-plates, but I managed to shut off steam before they did any mischief. When that was done, the next fear was that the boilers would go under the increased pressure, but I got every available valve open as quick as I could, and they'll blow off now safely enough."

"Then both pairs of engines are quite disabled?"

"Absolutely, for the present. I might tinker up the starboard to make her do three or four knots. There is a spare section of shafting we could have put in place of the broken one; but, as I say, everything else has gone to smash. In fact, the port engines will have to be hoisted out of her and taken to the workshops ashore before they can be of any use."

"Anybody hurt?" inquired the captain.

"I'm afraid some of them are badly scalded with the steam. They were calling out like mad just after the crashing ceased. But the place was that thick one couldn't see an inch; and as all was done that could be done on the spur of the moment, I thought I'd bring

up my report straight away. However, now you know what's happened, I'll see what I can do for the poor beggars."

And down the brave fellow went into the hot white mist, regardless of his own safety, intent only on succouring those of his subordinates who were in want of assistance.

The third mate, who had caused himself to be lowered by a rope over the stern, came next.

"I swung down on to the rudder chains," said he, "and as the water is quite clear everything showed plainly. The port screw is carried clean away, and the out-board portion of the shaft is bent into a semicircle. The end's jammed hard into a big dent in the keel. The rudder's torn from its bottom pintle, and the web is twisted up like a sheet of brown paper, and torn besides. As far as I can make out, the starboard screw is sound, save for having lost a blade, but the bushing seems a bit out of place."

"Any plates torn off?" inquired Macadam.

"None that I could see, sir. Some of the rivets may be started, but there's no open gap. She's a bit dented, though, on the port side, but she's heaving too much on the swell to make certain of the smaller details. I'll dive down and try and make out more, though, if you like."

"Never mind that just now, Mr. Livrock. I want to know if she's making much water. Well, carpenter?"

"Seven inches in the well, sir," reported the car-

penter. "She'll have made most of that in strainin' at the pace she's been going at these last hours."

I turned away here. There was evidently no fear of the *Lynx* foundering if the weather remained anything like moderate. She was practically as sea-worthy as ever, and under single screw she could, if unmolested, make any port she wished to. But there were evidences to show that we should not be left to our own devices for long. The torpedo-boat which had reduced the *Lynx* to her present condition had steamed to a position about a quarter of a mile on our beam, where she lay wallowing idly in the trough of the sea. Some of her crew were out on deck fitting a new flag and staff in place of those we had shot away. Her small boat, which had lain on chocks amidships, had been blown piecemeal into the ocean; and so, had she wished to board us and take possession, she could have only done it by sheering up alongside. As there was a fair sea running, she might have got stove in by attempting this. And besides, as we had not yet formally surrendered—we had run under the British flag, remember, and fought with no bunting aloft whatever—her people were dubious of the reception they might receive if they boarded us. They might get roughly tumbled back whence they came; they might be held as hostages. Our conflict seemed to them—as, indeed, it did to many of us—hardly within the recognized rules of modern warfare; and so they were rather chary about dealing with us. Had there been any

necessity for it, doubtless they would have attempted to extort formal submission. But as it was, the cruiser was coming up rapidly astern, and she was far more competent to see the matter out to its end.

I gazed upon the sturdy spars and white-painted hull of that advancing war-ship with much disquietude. We were absolutely helpless either to evade or resist her. She could do what she liked with us. From the judgment her commander passed upon us there would be no appeal.

Sure of her prey, she was coming up to us under easy steam, dividing the crests of the rollers with her sharp stem, and gliding onwards with an easy undulating movement that was very typical of brutal strength and remorselessness. She was under no canvas whatever, and the only things which relieved the barren outline of her spars and rigging was the red and white Chilian ensign which blew out stiffly from the peak, and a tiny fluttering wind-vane at her main-mast-head. All else was taut and trim and snug.

Her crew were all at their fighting stations, but many of them were visible to us. The uniforms were much the same as those in our own navy. The men were dressed in white trousers, white duck jumpers, and straw hats; the officers, petty and otherwise, wore blue decked out with gold lace.

Instead of coming straight to us, as might have been expected, the cruiser made for the torpedo-boat first of all, and running pretty close alongside came to a

halt, and held some communication with her commander. We could hear the voices, but the distance was too great to make out what was being said.

Then a couple of boats were swung out and lowered from the davits, and after these had been manned by armed crews they shoved off and rowed towards the *Lynx*. I heard Captain Macadam order our port gangway to be unshipped and the ladder to be rigged and lowered, and from where I was standing by the taffrail saw a party of men set about executing the order. Evidently civility was to be the order of the day now, which, all things considered, was distinctly for the best. It was of no use angering the Chilians further by forcing them to scramble up the steamer's smooth tall sides as best they could. We were under the guns of the cruiser, and it was wise to accept the situation and not raise further disagreeableness, which would only be returned with interest.

The two boats came up alongside, tossed their oars, and hooked on, and twenty-five seconds later a party of thirty men armed with cutlass and revolver, were drawn up on our decks. They were in my view, but the two officers who had accompanied them were out of sight behind the pilot-house; and so, stirred with curiosity to see what was going on, I went forward.

The decks were strewn with packing-cases, open and unopen, as I had seen them last; the hatches were off, and the main-hold gaped blackly. Beside the combing on the starboard side was mounted one of

those machine-guns, with the muzzle pointing almost vertically; and standing behind it, with his thumbs pressed on those two catches at the breech which would start the automatic mechanism, was Captain Macadam.

The two Chilian officers were talking to one another in Spanish when I came up. After a minute or so's consultation one of them addressed Macadam in English. "I cannot give you the assurance you require on my own responsibility, *señor*. By every law you are—how you call it?—*picarons*, pirates, and as such we have the right to string you up without further ado. As an officer of the Chilian navy I cannot yield to your threatened intimidation. I must leave the discretion in the hands of my senior, the commander of the *Dodreda*. So, *Señor*, I will thank you to word your ultimatum so that I may pass it across to him."

Macadam bowed courteously. "*Señor* Lieutenant," said he, "here's the whole thing in a nutshell. I simply ask for the assurance that our lives shall be respected. Promised that, I will surrender to you *à buena guerra*. But if you still hold to the notion of hanging the lot of us, I fear that you personally, *señor*, will not witness any such ceremony. You know enough about machine-guns to be aware of what will happen if I press my thumbs home now; and you are sufficiently acquainted with the nature of the *Lynx's* cargo to guess what will occur if I fire down amongst it. No, *señor*, no. Don't finger your revolver. You might

shoot me, I grant; but this sweet weapon here fires six hundred shots to the minute, and even supposing I were only allowed three seconds, that would mean thirty shots. Will you kindly notice that big oblong case below which the gun is trained on? It is packed with Palliser shells,¹ and I will not insult your technical knowledge by enumerating the particular excellencies of such a material to serve my present purpose. The rest of the ammunition is stowed close around it, so that I don't think there can be any doubt as to what the result would be if I did fire."

The two officers consulted together again for a minute or so, and then one of them turning round hailed the cruiser, and I suppose told her captain of the fix he had found himself in. For a quarter of an hour the stentorian conversation was kept up; and then the officer who had been spokesman before informed us that his captain would take no action against us on his own responsibility, but would deliver us over to the shore authorities.

"Will he pledge his word of honour to that?" asked Macadam.

"He will, *Señor*," replied the lieutenant. "But at the same time I wish you clearly to understand that this is due in no wise to your threat to blow up our prize, together with us her captors, and your own selves."

¹ Palliser shells are without fuses, and explode on concussion with a hard surface. A bullet, striking the apex, would of course produce explosion.

"No, of course not," Macadam admitted readily enough.

"For," continued the lieutenant, "my commanding officer is not the man to be bent from his purpose by such a trick as this. And now, as my orders are to transmit the whole crew to the *Dodreda*, I must ask you all to go down to my boats."

So into the boats we accordingly went, and were rowed across to the war-steamer.

CHAPTER XI.

UNDER HATCHES.

IT was mid-day when we were rowed across; and the sun, which was at its zenith, blazed down from a cloudless sky. The white heat of the noon reflected from the water scorched and burned us, but it was nothing compared with what was to come. Our quarters on board the *Dodreda* were below the gun-deck in an empty hold. The place was small and we filled it. One of the bulkheads was against the boilers, and hot enough to scorch a hand that touched it. We were below the water-line and had no light. The hatches were shipped and wedged tightly down. And in a little time the air was suffocating.

Choking with the foul atmosphere, we yelled and screamed and battered at the walls of our prison like

a pack of maniacs. The hatches were slid off, and the guard threatened to fire on us if we didn't be quiet. We bade them shoot and be hanged to them; but an officer with more brains or more humanity than the rest saw what was amiss, and bade his men substitute a grating for the solid hatch, and rig a wind-sail to help the ventilation.

Our lot was more endurable after that, and gathering into knots we began to discuss our prospects.

The whole of the *Lynx's* complement were in that small hold. Skipper, stewards, stokers—all were herded in together like so many sheep. Our captors evidently considered that we were all tarred with the same brush, and were not inclined to make any distinctions of persons.

"I'm sorry, Musgrave, that you and Bathurst have got into this scrape," Macadam was saying; "but when we are heard in our own defence, you can plead being picked up at sea, and being obliged to stay aboard willy-nilly. They can't do much to you after that."

"We'll stick to the rest of you, captain," said Bathurst, "if any good can come of doing so. You may bet your hat on that. Frank and I aren't such a pair of ungrateful curs that we'd desert you at a pinch after all your kindness. You tell us what we can do, and we'll both do our best to carry it through."

"You are good lads, but I'm afraid you'll be powerless to help us. Anyway, you would be more use out of gaol than in, and besides, it's no use your sacrificing

yourselves without an object. No; you both hold out to what I say, and they can't clap you in limbo, and once outside you may be able to bear a hand to help the rest of us."

"What will they do?" I asked. "Nothing very dreadful, I suppose."

"I can't tell. I wish I could. But we are sure to catch it pretty warm anyway. They'd have hanged me as sure as fate if I hadn't played that trick on 'em, and probably strung up a dozen others to keep me company. Year in year out, they're a pretty lawless lot about here, and life is always cheap; but when they're fighting, they think no more of a man's life than they do of a fly's. Not that these Chilians are peculiar in that. Our employers of Peru are just as bad, and all the other Spanish-American states would run them very close. As a Yankee once put it to me, they've all got a cross of the tiger and a dash of the snake in their blood, and they like killing people just for the fun of the thing."

"Seems to be a pleasant neighbourhood," remarked Bathurst. "I'm glad our surrender wasn't an unconditional one. That threat of yours to blow up all hands together was a fortunate idea, captain."

Macadam chuckled quietly. I couldn't see his face, but I could hear his smothered laughter.

"Don't tell anyone," he said. "It's far best to let them remain in ignorance till they find it out for themselves, though I shouldn't be surprised if some of them

had a shrewd suspicion of the truth already. But the fact is, those Palliser shells weren't loaded, and were just as dangerous as paving-stones, and no more so. Those two fools guessed that the *Lynx* had a lot of powder in bulk on board, as I intended they should. But she hadn't half a pound, and although she'd a good many cases of made-up cartridges, they aren't things to go off all at once, and cause a devastating explosion. However, the device served its turn."

We were three days under weigh. By means of a watch-chain compass we learned that the cruiser was not going back to help in the blockade of Callao, but was holding on down the coast towards her own country, presumably with the intention of disposing of us.

What had been done with the *Lynx* we did not know, nor had we any means of finding out, for the sentries at the hatch were always surly, and refused to communicate, and we had no means of discovering matters for ourselves.

The time passed but slowly. Cooped up in that dirty reeking hold, our situation was the reverse of pleasant. The place was almost pitch dark, and the air both night and day was hot and foul and stifling. We were given no water to wash in; and indeed, all the ordinary necessities of civilized life were entirely wanting. We were able to gather a very shrewd sort of notion of what the 'tween-decks of a slave-ship was like in the olden days. We all disliked our situation

excessively, but as there was no redress, we were bound to grin and bear it.

Only one incident worthy of note occurred whilst we were engaoled in the *Dodreda's* filthy hold. Sailor-like, the men found time hang very heavily on their hands when there was absolutely nothing to do. With anything, however trivial, to employ their fingers, they would have been quiet. With some pieces of old rope to weave into mats, they would have been happy. But as the dismal hold was bare, and as there wasn't so much as a bone to carve, they had nothing to do but sit about idly and talk. They probably all knew—the older ones certainly did—what would occur under the circumstances. But the situation was forced on them, and they could not escape it. For the first day they simply grumbled vaguely. On the second some trivial topic was started, which none of them cared twopence for, but which all attacked, one way or the other, with intense energy and acerbity. As a consequence, the deck hands took one side, and the stokers and coal-trimmers another; and on the morning of the third day of our imprisonment their wordy strife merged into physical conflict. As they had all been deprived of their knives, there was no great danger to be apprehended, and the officers, thinking that it would do them good to let off a little steam, forebore to interfere, although, when the two parties warmed up to their work, there were some pretty shrewd blows being distributed from both sides; and as the scene of action

was extremely dark, a man was just as likely as not to let drive at one of his own side as at one of his temporary opponents. But that didn't matter in the least. If they had been left to their own devices, there would have been a few discoloured eyes, and a few teeth missing from their proper moorings. The *mêlée* would have ended as it had begun, and the combatants, with their imaginary grievance thoroughly settled, would have shaken hands, and promptly become the best of friends again.

But, in the thick of the scrimmage, an officer came to the grating, and, picking up a revolver, deliberately fired straight down into the struggling mass of men below. By that wonderful law which sometimes allows bullets to worm their way through a dense crowd without doing mortal injury, no one was killed. But one of the men had a finger taken off, and two or three others got shrewdish galls from the shots, and the exclamations of these roused the others to a consciousness of what was going on. The row came to a sudden end, and, with fierce anathemas against their gaolers, the men relapsed into a sullen silence.

This will show that, in spite of the assurance given that we should not be hanged, the Chilians set very small store on our lives, and that the look-out ahead of us was the reverse of cheering. Hitherto I had been of opinion that "it would all come right somehow." But after that brute of an officer had fired down recklessly amongst the lot of us, I was less hopeful.

CHAPTER XII

THE HULK.

AFTER those three days' steaming we brought up to an anchor (so a moderation of the rolling and pitching told us) in some land-locked harbour.

Soon afterwards we were paraded on deck, and several of the officers and men, who had been there before, recognized the place as Valparaiso. The town is a large one, consisting mainly of a long narrow street of one-storied houses built along the winding shore. The houses are solidly made of sun-dried brick, and as almost every one possesses a gaily-painted piazza, their different colours give the place a very bright appearance. The harbour is sheltered from all winds except the north, and is defended by several forts and a battery on a level with the water.

From the conversation going on around us, we learned that the *Dodreda* was going into dry dock to have some defects in her hull and machinery made good, and that her crew were to be transferred to a corvette which had been just discharged. But more we could not gather; for, soon after the cruiser came to an anchor, we were drafted off to an old hulk which lay at moorings in the harbour, and passed down into her hold.

The hulk had evidently been used as a prison before, and from the filthy state of her interior we judged

that this had been at no distant date. A heavy iron grating covered the main hatch, and stout iron bars guarded the ports which had been cut in her sides. But some canvas buckets were given us, and with these and a dozen old besoms we set to work to clean up. As the hulk was tolerably leaky, there was no stint of water to swill down with; so we gave the curving walls and floor of our prison a scouring that they had been strangers to for many a long day, and then, baling the water up from where it collected, threw it from the barred port-holes into the sea outside.

After the previous spell of inaction all hands enjoyed the splashing about and scrubbing immensely, and the brown planks of that hulk's interior were scrubbed till their frayed sides were smooth. The sentries from above looked down on our efforts with obvious amusement; but they did not interfere, and four more days slipped away with comparative easiness. The food was dreadfully bad, being served to us in tubs like so many pig-troughs; but the donors of it prevented grumbling at the quality by restricting the quantity down to the smallest possible limit, so that we were glad enough to get it when it came, and our appetites were always too keen to permit of any leavings.

At the end, however, of those four days we were again paraded on deck, and only a comparative few of us were returned to the prison below. Bathurst and I, who were both wearing brass-buttoned jackets given us by the *Lynx's* officers, were amongst the

latter. But our Spanish-speaking purser, who was in mufti, went, and, in fact, it was only those of us who had brass mountings on our clothes who were left behind; but although the intention had obviously been to weed out the officers, they had left five of the stewards with us, to our and their no small merriment.

Watching through the open ports, we saw our former shipmates taken over to a gunboat which had just been warped out of dock, and as they went on board and stayed there, we had no doubt that they had been induced by threats or promises to join the Chilian service, and I think of those that were left behind there were several who wished the selection had been more extensive. However, it did not seem all easy going for our men on the war-steamer, for presently we saw one of them handed down into a boat again, and being rowed back whence he came. As the boat came alongside the hulk we saw that the one who had returned to us was the cross-grained old sailor Peter.

"Well, Peter," said Macadam, when the fellow had been handed below and we were once more securely locked in, "have you conscientious scruples against joining the Chilian navy?"

"Conscientious scruples be blowed, capt'n!" responded the man. "I'd ha' joined if they'd offered to treat me right, and I said so. But the grub wasn't to my likin'. I axed about that when I'd got the pen in me fist to sign on. I says, 'ow often d' you give the 'ands forrard pork aboard this wessel o' yours?' An'

the horfficer 'e larfs an' says they don't believe in pork, but that there's plenty o' good salt beef goin', which is better. 'That won't do for me,' says I, an' chucks down the pen. 'Salt 'orse is hall werry good in its way, an' five days a week I can do with it. But Peter T. ain't served yet on a craft where there isn't a bit o' sweet brine-pickled pork to put 'is teeth into at the least once a week, an' 'e ain't goin' to begin now.' 'Then you won't join?' says the horfficer. 'I've said so,' says I, 'an' I ain't in the 'abit o' changin' me mind.' 'Then you'll go back to the 'ulk,' says 'e, 'an' maybe you won't find the wittles to yer likin' there.' 'I'll take me chance o' that,' says I, an' down I goes in the boat."

This was the explanation the amiable Peter T. vouchsafed to us—I never learned his whole surname; he always referred to himself as Peter T., and was always spoken of and addressed as Peter simply. But I found out afterwards that, although his narrative of what had occurred was perfectly correct, his objection to the bill of fare was merely a blind to hide his real reason for not joining the Chilians. It was not that he feared the chances of war. And he could have had no particular objection to the flag. But in his own curious, cantankerous way he had conceived an odd dog-like kind of regard for Macadam, and, come sunshine or come storm, he had every intention of sticking to him as long as he was able. The captain was quite aware of this, but made no allusion to it. If he had done so

Peter would have denied it flatly, would have said that he cared for Macadam no more than he did for any other man, and he would have added that one skipper was as good to him as another provided his victuals were right and his wages regular. In fact, Peter's temper was as wrinkled and ill-conditioned as his face, and that is saying a good deal.

After our party had been divided we were left on board the hulk without a guard. Once a day we were provided with food and water, but after these supplies had been delivered the bearers took themselves off in their boat and left us alone for another twenty-four hours.

Needless to say, we thought of setting ourselves free. I think Bathurst was the first to suggest escape. But when we came to tot up our chances the result was a beggarly zero.

Macadam put it thus: "We might contrive to get up on deck, I'll grant that. But we couldn't get any further. Thanks to the pleasant habit the people in the town there have of heaving all their offal and other refuse into the water, the harbour swarms with sharks. Look out of that port and you'll be able to count a dozen dorsal fins any minute, or perhaps twenty if you have luck. Well, it stands to reason we should have a very poor chance in the mile there is to swim between here and the shore with those greedy scavengers on the look-out. And besides, even if we did get to shore, what could we do? Nothing. We should get nabbed again

before two hours were over, and then get it all the hotter for trying to escape. You can lay your thumb-nails on it the Chilians wouldn't be such idiots as to leave us here alone if they thought that there was any chance of our levanting. I'm sorry for you all—I'm sorry for my own fix for that matter—but I'm afraid there's no help for it but to stay philosophically where we are and make the best of the unpleasant circumstances."

"Isn't there a British consul here?" asked the first mate, who was, as I have said, a family man, and who was very anxious to get away on account of his wife and children, "or did he leave the place when the war began?"

"No; we have a consul here," replied the captain, "and he or his representative are bound to be in the city to look after British interests. And what's more, I managed to get a message sent to him through one of the men on the *Dodreda*, which I daresay he received, as I told the fellow he'd get well paid for his information when it was delivered. But as we have heard nothing in return I'm afraid he's washed his hands of us. You see, our game is not only illegal, but also one for which the Chilians have the warmest dislike; and so the consul, perhaps, knowing that he can do us no good, does not champion our cause for fear of bringing down odium on the many British subjects who are resident here."

Day after day passed by and still we were not

brought to trial, nor was there any sign of our dreary imprisonment coming to an end. By way of passing the time the whole lot of us set about learning Spanish from General Andarrez; but, heavily as the hours weighed on our hands, that was not an amusement which would carry us all easily through the successive days. It is astonishing how soon one gets tired of the conversation of a limited circle. We had been cooped up together for three months now, and all topics of interest had been thoroughly thrashed out. I daresay this is a very lamentable confession to make; but then, you see, we were none of us super-intellectual people, being, in fact, just ordinary members of the human race, neither cleverer than the average nor the reverse. And so, after we had sighed through all that weary time, being baked by the white heat of the daytime and frozen in the cold sea-mists of night, we had arrived at such a stage of hatred for our condition that we were prepared to do almost anything which would ameliorate it.

However, in spite of this, when a proposal was made by which we could effect our escape, there were a good many amongst us who considered it over-hazardous, and would not have dared it unless the majority had been firmly determined to take the decisive step and put their fate to the issue,

CHAPTER XIII.

SCHEMINGS

IT was Walter Bathurst's scheme. He had been wandering up and down that empty hold for many days previously like a caged jackal. He said he could not stand being shut up much longer, and we believed him. He was one of those chaps who would pine to death if boxed up for a length of time. He was country-bred, you see, and had always been used to freedom.

He was for the Peruvians heart and soul now, and so were most of us for that matter. That is to say, we so hated the Chilians, who were incarcerating us, that we had keen sympathy for any nation which shared our dislike for them. You who read this may not quite understand these sentiments, but then you don't know what being cooped up in an old hulk on short rations and under a fierce tropical sky is like. So please take my word for it that the ordeal was enough to nearly send one mad.

Our floating prison was riding beam on to the entrance of the harbour, and through two of the gridded ports which commanded a view of her we were watching a cruiser steam in from the outside. She was under sail and steam both when first we saw her, but she handed her canvas as she came

in, and running leisurely along under steam only, made for a buoy that lay within a cable's length of us, got hold of the chain to which it was attached, moored herself thereto, and so saved the trouble of putting down her anchors. We recognized her as the *Dodreda*, the identical vessel which was the cause of our misfortune; but beyond abusing her and all belonging to her in a perfunctory sort of way, none of us had energy sufficient to think or say any more about her; and lying down on the flooring of the hold again, those of us who had risen, we recommenced our employment of trying to dream the rest of the day away.

But Bathurst kept his face at the bars, and every now and then dropped some remark or other that the rest of us were all too miserable to pay much attention to.

At last he said, "How many of a crew d'ye suppose that chap has aboard, all told, captain?"

"Don't know," returned Macadam. "But not many short of two hundred and eighty or three hundred, counting all hands forward and aft."

"You've underestimated it. They've been going off towards the shore in boats, and I've counted three hundred and seven. There must be some aboard. I can see a couple of marines doing sentry at the gangways."

"Then I was wrong," replied the skipper indifferently.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Bathurst, "if it only could be done!"

"What's that, Walter?" said I.

"If we could get on board, and run away with her; + wouldn't that be grand?"

"Grand," I responded, but without the slightest enthusiasm.

Bathurst turned round angrily. "I never saw such fellows as you all are. One would think you were resigned to staying in this hole for the rest of your existence."

"No more resigned than you are, my dear fellow," said Macadam. "I'm keen enough to get away, but I'm afraid cutting out the *Dodreda* is a trifle beyond us. You see our resources are limited. We should have to get to her first."

"I'd swim," exclaimed poor Walter, "if I couldn't get there any other way."

"Bathurst," said the captain, "don't be childish. Look out of the port. See the sharks. How far do you think they'd let you go?"

Walter was silent at this, but after a minute or so he broke out again:

"The boats are going to another ship, a big iron-clad that's just hauled out of the dockyard, and the men are going on board of her with their bundles. It looks uncommonly like as if they were going to be transferred. And there goes a flag aloft—And, yes, there's no bunting showing on the *Dodreda*. Her

commander has changed his ship—promotion, I suppose—and he's taken his crew with him."

He went on making observations and deductions in this sort of way for some considerable time, no one taking any particular notice of him, except by saying "Ah!" or "Really," or something like that occasionally, just for politeness sake. At last, as though tired of this, he stepped down from his look-out point, and coming to me asked me to go forward with him. Ready enough for anything except lying still doing nothing, I did so, and we went together to the bulkhead which cut off the hold from the forecastle, a point which was in gloomy twilight.

"I want you to feel about, Frank, till you find a board which is loose," said he.

"What on earth for?" I asked.

"Never mind, but do as I tell you. I'll bet that new breech-loader of mine at home to your old trout-rod with the warped butt that we get out of this place before we're fifteen hours older."

"I'll take the bet," said I, "and I'll do my honest best to help you win it, although I should like that twelve-bore immensely."

"Then do as I've told you," he replied, "and look for a plank that we can wrench or lever off."

So closely was the bulkhead put together that it seemed at first all of one solid piece. I thought the task a hopeless one, but went on with it diligently, partly because there was nothing better to do, and

partly to humour my companion. Perhaps his search was the more systematic. Anyway, he called to me, and I found he had discovered a chink between the outside plank and the side of the ship.

"It's caulked with oakum," he said, "but I've got a bit of a hole, and I'm working it larger. Do you start on the other side, and when we've got all the caulking clean out we'll find the nails, and draw them."

The task was slightly galling to the fingers, but we stuck to it, and in time had all the oakum picked out. Then Bathurst cast his eye around him for something that would serve as a lever, and spying a rusty wrought-iron nail sticking in the ceiling, wrenched that out, and straightened it under his heel. It was one of those nails commonly spoken of as "tenpenny," and by letting the pressure fall on its broader side we managed to prise the plank off without bending our lever.

"The hole isn't big enough to slip through yet," said Walter; "but we'll just jam this plank back again and leave it for the present. It will then appear all right if anybody looks at it casually, and if we do want to get on deck via the forecastle, it won't take long to force a wider entrance through the bulkhead, now that the first gap has been made."

This operation, though it doesn't take long to describe, had occupied several hours. I had stuck to it the whole time, only too glad to have something to busy myself with; but Bathurst had run away every

twenty minutes or so to peer out of the port-holes, and make sure that his conjecture about the transhipment of crew from cruiser to heavy ironclad was correct.

"I was certain of it," he said every time he returned to work; and I, though by no means sanguine of getting away, felt that my spirits were rising through his influence.

It was getting on towards nightfall when we had dislodged the plank, and Walter went off and entered into consultation with the skipper, drawing him on one side and conversing with him in low tones. What they were saying I couldn't hear, but it was evident that the point under discussion was a knotty one. Gradually I could see from Macadam's face that he was coming round to Bathurst's way of thinking. He had given up tugging at his beard, which was his constant habit when perplexed or worried about anything, and had shoved his hands into his trousers pockets, which was a sure sign that he had made up his mind, and intended to carry his project through if will and strength could do it.

The sun was balancing redly on the western horizon when the captain opened his lips to the rest of us, and bade us look out of the port-holes with the last of the light. The wind had shifted several points to the southward, and the cruiser was out of our view astern. The sky promised rain and a dirty night, and every sign showed that the weather would be down on us before long

Captain Macadam waited to let us digest these facts which we had culled for ourselves, and then addressed us.

"An opportunity presents itself," he said, "for doing three things at one stroke which we are all anxious to do. That there is risk attached to it, I don't deny; but it's a case of now or never, and as the odds are well in favour of success I don't think we should let the chance pass by. The idea is not mine; let the credit be given where it is due. Bathurst here has formulated the scheme, and has shown himself to possess the levellest head on board. If his plan can be carried through, we shall escape from this detestable prison; we shall have a good revenge on the Chilians for the loss of the *Lynx*; and I don't doubt but what we shall be comfortably in pocket besides.

"However, as the time is getting short, I won't trouble you with a long preamble. The plan is simply this. As soon as darkness falls we will go on deck, and slip the hulk's cables. With the wind as it is at present we shall drift down on to the *Dodreda*. The night will be dark, and if we work quietly we shall probably not be noticed till we are close aboard. There are only a couple of sentries on her deck now, and it is improbable that more than a mere anchor watch will be set after dark. We must overpower them, and secure what other men there are below. I do not anticipate any trouble on that score. Men are at a premium now, and they have evidently drafted every

available hand on to that ironclad that's just been warped out of the dockyard.

"Once the *Dodreda* is ours, we will slip the moorings and take her out under canvas, getting up steam in the meanwhile. There is a fair wind to take her outside now, and as no one in the forts is likely to suspect anything wrong, we should get clear and away without being reported, if we have luck, and nobody will know before morning what has happened. They'll be feeling pretty rabid then, I daresay; but that won't matter much to us. They are not likely to know which way we have gone—the South Pacific's a large place, and the groove a ship makes through it soon fills up again—but even if they knew our course, they couldn't damage us. The only war-vessel in harbour here is that ironclad, and she's one of the old-fashioned class with the knottage of a Thames lighter. Even if she were ready for sea, which I doubt, there would be no chance of her overhauling the *Dodreda*. So that, as far as can be foreseen at present, there is no possible bar to success."

The very audacity of the scheme fairly took the breath away from some of us at first; and when the captain had finished his say, there arose a pretty fair chorus of objections. The first and second mates viewed the undertaking with strong disfavour. They would be glad enough to escape from their present durance vile, and they would not stick at trifles to gain that end. But this was a bit too much of a large order. The captain had supposed that everything

would turn out well; and if matters did justify his sanguine expectations, the project certainly did seem feasible, in theory. But too much seemed to be taken for granted. To begin with, we should have no command over the hulk once she was under weigh, and if she did not happen to drift in the desired direction we should find ourselves in a very queer predicament. And then again, even supposing that we ran her successfully alongside, we might find ourselves in a hornet's nest. It was only conjecture that the crew on board was a slight one; there might be a lot of men down below. In fact, considering that it was war-time, the authorities would hardly leave one of their most valuable vessels with an insufficient guard.

"Wait a minute," said Bathurst at this moment. "I will tell you a reason for that. The forts command the entrance to the harbour. Their look-outs would detect a ship coming in, and would fire on her if they thought she was a hostile war-vessel, and would sink her. So you see it would be superfluous to leave a second guard on the *Dodreda*; for they would never dream of the attack coming from within."

"There is something in that," admitted the second mate, Bygott, a thin, round-shouldered man, with a wrinkled forehead and a perennially anxious eye, who had been constituted mouthpiece of the opposition party, if I may distinguish them as such. "But what about the forts firing on the *Dodreda* if they see her going out without explanation?"

"They would hardly do so," said Macadam, "just because they didn't understand her movements. Don't you see, news might have reached Valparaiso which made it necessary to re-man the swift cruiser and despatch her somewhere on the spur of the moment. If we are questioned we must try and blunder with signals, and bamboozle them somehow or other. And if they do use us as a target, which, as I say, I don't think there is the smallest fear of, well, we must just take our chance. From what little experience I've had of Chilian gunnery so far, it seems neither scientific nor deadly."

"If those chaps at the fort heard a scrimmage going on aboard the *Dodreda*," observed the second mate, "and then saw the vessel going out under sail directly after without answering signals, there's not much doubt but what they'd try to stop her or sink her. And it's no manner of use trying to disguise the fact. I say plainly I don't think the game's good enough. 'Taint likely we could seize the ship without a gun or a pistol popping off somewhere, or some yells being heard that couldn't be mistaken for music. And once there's a bit o' noise of that kind, we're as good as done for. If we ain't shot we'll be caught, and if we're caught we'll be hanged, as sure as Haman was. We haven't got spring mattresses to lie on here, I'll grant you, and we aren't fed on delicacies; but we are let live, and that, for a man who's got a wife and bairns depending on his earnings to keep 'em out of the

workhouse, is a matter that's got to be thought about. If we'd got the whole of the *Lynx's* old crew we might risk it, but here we are fifteen all told, and out of them there's only five professional sailor-men. With that handful it would be madness to make the attempt, and if this is supposed to be a capstan-head council, I tell you plainly, Captain Macadam, with all due respect, that my bean's going against you."

"I'll not call you a coward, Bygott," returned the captain; "I've seen enough of you to know that you can show pluck in time of need. But I must say I think you are going in for undue caution here. Of course I can understand your ties as a family man; but then you must remember that here, in prison, with no prospect of release, you are doing your family no good. There is risk, of course, in the scheme proposed; but I believe that risk to be comparatively small. And there's another thing to be remembered. If we carry the plan through we shall not find ourselves empty-handed at the end of it. War-vessels are not particularly cheap sort of articles at the best of times, but out here just now they are at a premium, and the prize-money which will be ours when we hand the *Dodreda* over to the Peruvians will set most of us up comfortably for the remainder of our lives. I've referred that matter to the general here, and he assures me that it is so.

"Come now, lads," Macadam continued, "here's darkness down upon us, and we're jawing away like a pack of washerwomen and coming to no definite

conclusion. If we're going to do anything it must be done at once, so I put it to the vote—those in favour of the attempt, stay here to starboard; those against, step over to port. Now, then, have you all made up your minds? Well, then, we'll count heads—one, two, three, five, six, eight. The majority is for the attempt. Now, for the last time, does anyone want to change his mind?"

Nobòdy stirred.

"Then," continued the captain, "we'll begin to break through to the upper deck at once, and make our attempt without further delay."

"But," objected Bygott, "what is to become of us seven who are not going to join in this hare-brained scheme?"

"You simply won't join in it, that's all, my dear fellow," replied the captain pleasantly. "You can stay below here. The hulk will drift ashore somewhere or other inside the harbour—underneath the fort yonder on the spit if the wind holds as it is—and in the morning they'll see you, and when they come and inspect, you can report how we got away. No doubt they'll reward you for your consideration in not levanting too."

The second mate smiled in a rather sickly sort of way. "I'm afraid you've got us on the hip, captain," said he. "Whatever happened to you, our fate would be pretty sure. Whether you got away, or whether you didn't, they would grab us and shoot us there and then out of spite. You force us to join you."

"As I intended," retorted the captain with a chuckle. "The *Dodreda* is a big vessel, and with fifteen of a crew we shall be short enough handed. I'd have risked it with the eight, but we should have had a tough job from sheer lack of brute force. Indeed, it would have been a physical impossibility to have kept her under any decent head of steam for long; but the fifteen will do it with comparative comfort. We only want to make a passage, not to fight her, and with a watch of eight we ought to jog along at a small rate pretty easily. But come, we're all of one mind now, and mustn't waste any more time in palavering. Here, Ferguson, you and I are the two strongest of the gang. Let us make a breach through that bulkhead, and see how few minutes it can take us to work our way out on deck."

CHAPTER XIV.

BOARDING THE *DODREDA*.

THE captain removed the plank that Batnurst and I had loosened, and then he and the chief engineer, laying hold of the next and bending their sturdy backs to the work, quickly had it adrift from its moorings and laid on one side.

Beyond was not the fore-castle as I had expected, but a dark noisome hole that I heard the seaman Peter call the "lazaret."

Anxious to be of some use, I slipped under the skipper's arm and scrambled through the gap, only, however, to meet with a very unpleasant surprise inside. The curved inner sheathing of the vessel was coated with a greasy slime that gave no hold to either feet or hands; so that, directly I was through the opening, away I slithered right down to the keelson. There I fetched up short in a morass of evil-smelling filth (the concretions of years of uncleanness), and then stood up and looked about me. The place was as dark as the pit. No ray of light penetrated its dark secrets, so I tried to add to my knowledge by groping about. Around me were nothing but slime-covered planks and timbers; above me, nailed on beams, were the planks which formed the flooring of the forecastle.

Macadam inquired what I was doing. I told him. "There'll be a hatch somewhere above your head," said he. "Here, I may as well come and look for it myself. Being used to these things, I'm far more likely to find it." In he squeezed through the narrow opening—which, being tolerably portly, was as much as he could do—and I heard him gain the lower level in exactly the same undignified fashion as I had done myself. But before he had scrambled to a footing amongst the ooze and slush, my wandering hand had lit upon the hatch.

The small trap-door, some two feet square, which closed it, resisted my efforts to budge it from its place; but with the captain's ponderous strength brought to

bear in addition, it gave upwards, and we pushed it over on one side.

"Now, Musgrave," said the captain, "up you get. All safe? That's right. Now, give me a hand. I ain't so active as I was a dozen years ago. Catch hold of the neck of my coat. That's it. Now, heave! Here we are. Smells fusty, doesn't it?"

"The slide of the companion is locked outside," said I from the top of the ladder.

"Are the doors bolted inside?" Macadam asked.

I felt with my hands, and answered that they were, but that they were fastened on the other side as well.

"Try and burst them, then."

I strained and strained, but the stout fastenings would not budge, and then dropping down the ladder made room for the captain to try. Whilst he was making a similarly unsuccessful attempt, I groped about to find a bar of iron or something amongst the litter that strewed the place, but could lay hands on nothing but mouldering rope and rotting sail-cloth.

Meanwhile the others had gathered in the "lazaret" below, and were inquiring what had caused the delay. I told them, and getting a lift on to the combing, the seaman Peter dragged his squat body up into the fore-castle beside me.

"Let me 'ave a try at that 'ere job, capt'n," he growled; and Macadam, knowing the fellow's power, came down out of the way. I could hear Peter's bare feet patter rapidly up the ladder, and then there was

a bump, a splintering of woodwork, and a welcome inrush of the cool night air. The man had deliberately used his skull as a battering-ram, and had split the arched slide of the companion into matchwood. The head seemed none the worse for the encounter, and giving a grim chuckle of satisfaction at his success where others had failed, Peter quickly enlarged the opening, put out his hand and drew back the bolts from the outside, and in a minute more we were all on deck.

The night was cold—cold for the tropics, that is—and thick as a hedge with driving rain. There was no moon, and not a star was visible. The wind was blowing freshly, but, by help of the watch-chain compass, we learnt to our satisfaction that it had not changed, and that although we could not see her, the cruiser was still directly abaft of our stern.

However, little time was lost in congratulations which might turn out to be premature, for so far we were only at the commencement of our enterprise. The hulk was riding to single mooring anchor, but the chain forked just at the water-line, and the rusty links came in through the hawse-pipes on either bow, and were snugly shackled round the bitts. Rust had welded the fastening into an almost solid mass, and it was obviously a hopeless job to attempt unscrewing the shackles with the fingers. Bathurst produced his tenpenny nail, but it proved unequal to the task. It bent, and bent, and bent, and finally broke, and then

broke in a second place as it was tried again. It began to look as though we should be baulked in our enterprise almost at its very commencement. But Livrock, with a sailor's resourcefulness, managed to dislodge an iron pin from a cleat-rack, and with that one of the shackles was cast adrift, and the chain allowed to slip quietly overboard.

But still the starboard cable remained, and the third mate's implement was too big to go into the eye of its shackle-bolt. A marline-spike was what we wanted to turn it with, but search how we would no marline-spike would come to hand; and Bygott and his adherents began to hope that after all this mad adventure, in which they had been compelled to embark against their wills, would have to be abandoned. But whilst the others had been engaged in fruitless search, Bathurst had been seated beside the obdurate shackle, and with the sharp broken angle of his fractured "tenpenny" had been steadily riming away at the interior of that metal eye; and when, with a good many expressions of, shall we say, warm annoyance, the baffled searchers came to the conclusion that this quest was a hopeless one, my chum quietly announced that the iron cleat would fit in its socket now, and he could have the shackle adrift in half a minute when the order was given.

"Bravo, Bathurst!" exclaimed the captain. "I wish I could buy a new head-piece like yours. There's nothing to delay us further that I know of, and so it's

no use waiting here. Stand clear, every one, and slip that cable as soon as you can cast the shackle off."

We could hear the squeak of the rusty screw above the loud moan of the wind, and the splash of water against the hulk's bluff bows. But when the squeaking ceased as the last thread of the screw left its bed, there did not follow the clinking of cable which we were one and all breathlessly expecting. An eighth of a link slipped out, and the bolt of the shackle jammed and held it there. This sounds a trifle, but what with pressure of the wind and the sea on the hulk's broad apple bows, the strain on that cable was very heavy, and with our limited appliances it was not an easy matter to relieve it. Indeed, half an hour was spent before we got back that small fraction of a link so as to be able to withdraw the pin from its lodgment, and let the ponderous rusty chain rattle away and disappear for ever with a sullen splash.

It was then that the final die was cast. Up till that moment the first and second mates, and the rest of the timid ones, had been in hopes that something would still turn up to frustrate the hazardous scheme; and in the search for a lever to turn the shackles, and in the other little bits of jobs, it was easy to see that they were looking with a strong determination not to find. The captain, I could see, noticed this; but he said nothing, knowing full well that no words of his would alter matters, and that a remonstrance would only stir up bad blood. But with the clattering out

of that rusty end of chain cable the last hopes of this clique vanished. They knew it was a case of *vestigia nulla retrorsum*, and one could tell from the changed, the determined look of their faces, that they had made up their minds to help the rest of us to the greatest of their power to carry the affair through to a successful issue. One and all we were in for it now. Whatever happened, we should be hanged or shot for a certainty if we got caught; and so the only and obvious alternative was to put as much energy, mental and physical, into the struggle as each of us was capable of.

The movements of the unwieldy craft, on which depended the lives and fortunes of so many, were entirely beyond our control. Being empty, she showed a great deal of freeboard, and the impact of the wind upon this, and upon her lower masts which were still standing, sent her through the water at a tidy pace. But we had no means of judging our rate of drift, and no means of checking it. With the rudder, we might have got steerage-way on her, but it was unshipped, and so we were absolutely helpless in that respect. So bare had she been picked we could not even find a sound length of rope, much less a piece of warp to make her temporarily fast to the cruiser. If the wind had shifted half a point we should certainly be swept helplessly past. Indeed, I think when we were once fairly adrift that there wasn't one of us who did not believe he had thrown his life thoughtlessly away.

But it was too late for repenting then. Sink or swim, we were in for the trial, for there was no backward track.

With eyes anxiously straining through the gloom we all peered over the starboard quarter out into the wild whistling darkness for a first sight of the *Dodreda*. Being perhaps a little deeper in the water aft, the hulk had swung somewhat, and was gradually getting broad-side on to the wind. This was a good thing of course for us, for it improved our chance of hitting the goal; but it was dangerous in another way, for should our cumbersome conveyance run athwart the cruiser's bows, the crash would certainly wake every man in her, and bring them all with a run on deck, so that we might find more than we wanted to deal with. Besides which, the shock might very likely burst the cruiser from her moorings, in which case she would probably be hard and fast ashore before we could get her under command, and then—well, the after consequence made our necks itch to think about.

But, as I have said, we were not sufficiently masters of the situation to influence in any way our vessel's movements, and so there was nothing for it but to stoically bide our time.

Silently we mustered along that lee bulwark, straining our eyes into the wet gloom beyond, and listening with anxious ear for any sound that would tell us of the cruiser's nearness. But save for dense blackness, the swish of the seas, and the sobbing moans of the

wind, our senses showed us nothing. The passage could not have lasted many minutes, but to us then it seemed to protract itself into hours.

I don't know who saw the *Dodreda* first. I think a good many pairs of eyes must have spotted her simultaneously. For an eager murmur ran along the line of watchers, and the next moment her bows loomed out white and spectral through the mist.

We were nearing her rapidly. The hulk was drifting at an angle of about forty-five degrees with the direction of the wind, and, as she was going, the war-vessel's ram would catch her somewhere beneath the lee fore-rigging.

"All hands jump the moment she touches!" Macadam ordered in a hoarse whisper. "She'll probably bound off again immediately, for we aren't going at pace enough for the ram to drive home."

Slowly we swept on. The excitement was almost stupefying. Without knowing how I got there, I found myself over the bulwarks and in the starboard fore-chains of the hulk. Bathurst was beside me, and three others—but I forget who they were now—and the rest were close behind.

Nearer and nearer we drew, till the jib-boom, and then the standing bowsprit of the war-ship projected close over our heads, and I could see the water swirling round her sharp stem. Then there was a dull thud, our motion came to an abrupt stop, and I was half shot in the direction I wanted to go. A wire

bowsprit shroud fell into my hand—instinctively, I suppose, for I hadn't noticed it before—and passing myself rapidly along it I gained the bulwark of the cruiser, and dropped down on to the deck. I had been pretty quick, but Bathurst and Livrock were before me, and were running along the decks as fast as they could go.

I went after them, but stopped as I saw a head pop up through the fore-companion. Its back was towards me; but as it was no time for punctilio then, I let drive with my fist, and catching the unfortunate, whoever he was, an awful drive behind the right ear, toppled him over on to his nose. As quick as it could be managed, I gathered him up again, and tumbling him back down the stairs, slid on the slide, took the key from the inside, closed the doors, and locked them securely.

The others had all rushed past me by this time; and so thinking that the fore-peak was sufficiently secure for the time being, I followed them.

The surprise seemed to have been pretty complete. The two sentries had been seized and disarmed before they knew exactly what had happened. The upper deck was ours. But a pistol-shot from below told me that resistance was going on somewhere, and I followed the sound and ran aft. However, meeting Ferguson and Peter leading between them a Chilian officer lightly clad in pyjamas, I asked how matters were going.

"It's all right here, Musgrave, I think," said the engineer. "Captain Macadam grabbed this fellow in bed. There was a bit of a scuffle, but no one was hurt. The others are below making sure that there's no one else there. I expect most of the crew are forward. However, we must see to that next. Here, feel in my starboard pocket, and take that revolver."

I told him that I had made the fore-companion fast.

"That's well," said he. "But you aren't wanted here now; so go forward, and see they don't break out. If they try it on, frighten 'em if you can; but if they won't listen to reason, shoot. Mind that; don't be squeamish, or it may mean the hanging of the whole lot of us. Now, off you go!"

I didn't particularly care for the job. There's a vast deal of difference between hitting a man a hard clout behind the ear and putting a bullet through him. But, as the engineer had said, we were in it too thickly for squeamishness now. They were battering merrily at the inner side of the doors when I came up; but after tapping for silence, I assured those within, in my best Spanish, that I should most certainly shoot the first who came out, and probably the next five, and that the survivors would be tackled by the rest of our men, who were close at hand; upon which gruesome threat they desisted from their efforts to break out, and after a little whispered conversation inquired what had happened. I didn't see fit to tell them this exactly; and so remarking that they would find out soon enough,

bade them get off the stairs and remain peaceably on the deck below.

Directly afterwards a posse of twelve of our men came up, headed by the captain. They had scoured the rest of the ship, and found only a steward and a midshipman, besides the lieutenant in command, and these were secured without noise before they were thoroughly awake. What force lay below in the fore-castle no one knew, and so it behoved us to proceed with circumspection. But as the water-tight bulkhead which ran athwart the ship a little abaft the foremast was without doors, we had got them boxed up there with small possibility of escape; and as arms in plenty had been distributed amongst us, we could be tolerably sure of maintaining the upper hand. The only thing we wanted to avoid was anything approaching a noise which might be heard from the shore, and put the people in the forts and batteries up to imagining that anything had gone wrong. One revolver shot had gone off already, but we hoped that its whip-like report would pass unnoticed, or at any rate uninquired into, if it was not followed by others. So the men in the fore-castle were approached by diplomacy. They were told by General Andarrez that resistance was useless; that if they came up quietly one by one they would receive no hurt; but that if they kicked up a row in any way whatever, it would be so much the worse for them. And the wizened little general fulminated some bloodthirsty threats against possible offenders,

which, judging us by themselves, the fellows below thought us fully capable of fulfilling.

So up they came, one by one, to the number of four-and-thirty, not a little disgusted (when it was too late) to find that their fine ship had been captured by less than half their number, armed with no weapons except those which nature, to encourage physical discussion, generously provides to most people. However, regrets on their part were useless then, and one by one they were received on deck, and passed down to that very same hold in which we ourselves had been imprisoned just six weeks before. There might have been a more comfortable gaol on board, but we hadn't time to look for it then. That one we knew, and could trust; and as they had thought it good enough for us, we, in turn, considered it amply good enough for them. So we passed them down, hauled up the ladder, clapped on the grating, and made them all secure.

CHAPTER XV.

STUCK ON A SHOAL.

NOW, lads," said Macadam, when we regained the upper deck again, "the sooner we are under weigh, and away out of this, the better. General Andarrez will be a sufficient guard for the prisoners. I must overhaul the chart-house and find a plan of this



harbour, and prick out a course. It will be a ticklish job getting out in the dark without any landmarks, and without being able to see the buoys. But there's a fair wind, thank our luck; and if we keep the lead going carefully, and mind what we're doing, I think I ought to be able to take her through without touching. Now there should be thirteen of you—"

"There's only twelve, sir," interrupted Bardney, the chief officer. "Apthorpe, one of the stewards, tumbled between the vessels when we were boarding, and doesn't seem to have scrambled up again."

"I'm very sorry," returned the captain, "but it can't be helped. Everyone took his chance, and no one had time to stop and help poor Apthorpe then. We must hope he contrives to swim ashore. Well, there are twelve of you then. We won't trouble about the engines yet. We must get canvas on her first. Those that can go aloft must do it, and the rest must heave and haul on deck. And mind, men, no noise. You must do the work without shanties.¹ Mr. Bardney, I leave you to look after this. She carries single topsails,² I see; so if you get the fore and main on her, and the outer jib, that will be about all you will have time for. We'll plume her further as she goes, and

¹ A sailor hauling at a rope accompanies himself with a rude song, which times the climax of his efforts. Such ditties are called shanties, the word being derived from the French *chanter*, to sing.

² Almost all modern vessels carry double top-sails; that is, upper and lower topsails. Large craft frequently have their topgallant sails divided as well.

then see about getting up steam. Mr. Livrock, do you see that all is ready to slip the moorings. And Mr. Ferguson, we can't use our steam steering-gear yet. I want you to see that it is all disconnected, and that the other wheel is ready for use. Now then, all hands turn to with a will, and mind, above all, no noise. I expect to have her swung round and standing for the entrance of the harbour in half an hour."

Short-handed as we were, one of the huge top-sails at a time was every bit as much as we could manage. The four stewards and the second and third engineers didn't know one rope from another. So they remained on deck, where, under the guidance of the chief officer, they would be of use in hauling the various ropes. The other four of us went aloft; we were to set the foretop-sail first. I clambered into the top pretty easily; and the top-mast shrouds, being all rattled down, presented no difficulty. But shuffling along the foot-ropes of the yard, which were all slimy with the wet, was a different matter. The *Dodreda* had seemed steady enough below; but here, up aloft, she was rolling about as if there was a big sea on, and the wind was hustling by us in wet, stinging squalls. The shambling, round-shouldered second mate was beyond me at the yard-arm; and though he was a thorough-going "steamer-sailor," and hadn't been at his present occupation for a dozen years or more, he seemed perfectly at home on his swaying perch. He balanced himself with his chest on the massive iron yard, and

with his knock-knees bent, and his heels out on the foot-rope in the air behind him, he was working away with both hands as easily as though his feet had been firmly planted on *terra firma*.

Though feeling that I might fall at any moment, I endeavoured to imitate his posture; and then, after watching what he was doing, set about casting certain ropes adrift which seemed to confine the sail.

Glancing across at Walter, I saw that he was more at home with the work. He had been new to square-rigged vessels when we left Potter's Cove; but on the *B. James Brock* he had learned something, and on the *Lynx* he had gone in for a regular course of schooling in the subject. That is Walter's way. He is always learning something outlandish; though I must own that in some instances, like the present, what he has picked up comes in uncommonly useful. They were quicker than we were on the other yard-arm; but ours was loose at last, and the sail was let fall and sheeted home.

We were scampering rapidly down the ratlines after completing this operation, when I saw Bathurst, who was opposite me in the rigging, stop suddenly, turn his ear as if to listen, say something to Peter, who also listened and nodded. Then, as if the ordinary method was too slow for him, my chum seized a back-stay and slid down out of sight in a moment.

The night was very dark, and the cruiser had no lights showing. She was not exhibiting a riding light

when we boarded her, and, as you may guess, we had not thought it incumbent on our safety to hoist one. And moreover, besides the darkness, which was so thick with the driving rain that the deck was invisible from the fore-yard, there was a good deal of noise going on from the din which the wind kicked up in the rigging. But my senses were on the full alert after Bathurst's rapid disappearance—for I guessed it was no idle freak—and soon I distinguished, above the other sounds, the faint "splash, splash" of oars nearing us, and the accompanying "cheep-cheep," as they grated against the thole-pins. The second mate heard it at the same moment, and slid to the deck as Walter had done. I followed his example, scorching the skin from my hands with the pace the rope passed through them.

Arrived there, the second engineer said in a hoarse whisper, "There's a boat pulling off to us; coming up slow against the wind. Mr. Bathurst's gone below to fetch the Don up, so's to palaver 'em in their own language."

I joined the rest under the lee of the bulwarks. Bygott and Bardney were discussing the situation in low tones, and with frequent moans and shiverings. Poor wretches! they were scared. The other men were squatted down near, stolidly quiet.

"Look here," said I, "if we don't stir to help ourselves, we deserve all we can get and perhaps more. It's no good sitting pitying ourselves here. If the

General succeeds in diddling that boat's crew and sending them away, all will be well, but if on the contrary he has to entice them on board, we must be ready to grab them before they rise to the situation and give an alarm. So away we go to the gangway, and stow ourselves snugly on either side to receive them with due honours in case they do see fit to bother us with a call."

Thus persuaded, they all came willingly enough; and we reached the gangway, to find Macadam and the General there before us.

"Humbug them, General," we heard the skipper saying in his execrable Spanish, "humbug them if you can manage it. We don't want 'em on board if we can help it. You must pretend to be the sentry and challenge, 'Boat ahoy!' They'll answer, and you must reply. But keep 'em off if you can, for if one comes aboard we must grab him, and then manage to collar the rest of the crew by hook or by crook."

The sound of advancing oars had grown very plain now, as the boat made its laborious way up against wind and sea. Macadam dropped back into cover, and the little General started pacing the gangway with regulation rapid step.

Presently the dim outline of the boat hove into sight, and the sentry challenged,

"Boat ahoy! What boat's that?"

"Friends, all right," came the response of a cheery voice. "Message from the commandant of the fort."

"Well, what is your message? Deliver it, can't you."

"Don't get savage, comrade. We've had a long pull against the wind from the point yonder, and we want a bit of rest before setting out again. Soldiers haven't got arms for rowing like you sailor men have."

"Well, hook on to the gangway then," retorted the sentry, "and rest there. My orders are to admit no one on board unless under special circumstances."

"Well, my surly friend," retorted the other with a jolly laugh, "mine are special circumstances, so you're all right. We heard a shot a bit since from this direction, and the commandant, who's a smart one for drill as you know, turned out the guard, had all the garrison beat to arms, and sent me and these other lads toiling off here with a letter to the lieutenant in command."

By this time the bowman had exchanged oar for boat-hook, and had fastened on to the gangway; and the General, who saw no help for it, sourly bade the steersman come on deck. The jovial one did so, and, doubtless much to his surprise, was safely taken care of the moment he landed. Two pairs of arms seized him and lifted him off his legs, and a third man clapped a piece of cotton waste into his mouth; the whole being so artistically done that his struggles couldn't have been heard a yard off. Indeed, the poor man was so thunder-struck with his reception that he offered scarcely any resistance, and he was carried into the chart-room and left under Peter's charge, on the distinct understanding that he would be shot if he offered to move an inch or utter the slightest sound.

The next thing was to get hold of the boat's crew. They would not return without the cheery sergeant who commanded them; and it was quite certain that, for a while at least, we could not dispense with his society.

So the sentry again approached the gangway, as if after escorting his visitor below, and announced that the boat's crew were to come on board and refresh themselves. This, judging by the way in which they received the order, was precisely the thing they wished to do, and five of them ran quickly up the ladder.

The first four were grabbed promptly. Number five saw that something was wrong and turned about on his heels to execute what instinct told him was the correct military manœuvre under the circumstances—to wit, a retreat. But a heavy hand laid on the collar of his tunic, and the hard muzzle of a revolver pressed against his hair close underneath the edge of his kepi, persuaded him to think better of it, and he too joined his fellows. There was one left behind as boat-keeper, and the struggles which were going on above him had so upset his nerves that he was just in the act of casting off the painter to slip away and leave his comrades in the lurch, when Bathurst jumped down almost on the top of him, and by measures more forcible than diplomatic, persuaded him to obey orders and come on board to share our hospitality.

And so we collared the whole of that boat's crew

and passed them down safely into the hold, without having made the least disturbance which would reach the shore.

Having thus got out of a scrape which at the first blush promised to be an ugly one, we proceeded next to set the main-topsail. The fore-topsail, which had been sheeted home, and was full aback, did not tend to make her any steadier; but I was a bit more used to the job this time, and so made a better performance. The coarse canvas was slipped out of its brails, and then was sheeted snugly home by the workers below. Then going forward we cast the tyers off the outer jib, and when that was hoisted the captain was ready for us.

Word was given to cast off, and when the chain had rattled through the hawse-pipe, all hands toiled at the starboard fore-topsail braces to back the sail and pay her head off. Round she came readily enough, bobbing gently over the small seas of the harbour, and, gathering steerage-way ahead as the main-topsail drew, started off on our course. We trimmed tacks and sheets once more, and then set about shaking out our courses.

The spokes of the wheel were in Macadam's own hands, and with the ramifications of the chart in his head, he hoped to pilot us out through the intricate channel with compass alone, save for such information as soundings could give him. Old Peter was in the main-chains with the hand-lead, and every two minutes

the leaden weight sung round his skull and then, swooping ahead, would fall with sullen splash into the dark waters beneath; and when leather, bunting, and knot ceased to pass from the coil in his hand, the callous sea-hoarsened voice would growl out an accurate sounding. Bred in a coaster, many a fog had that squat wrinkled-faced sailor felt his way through by lead alone, and he had acquired the perfect knack of using it that practice alone can give.

The remaining eleven of us were busy setting the fore and main courses, which, being large and heavy sails, took a good deal of handling. The wind was blowing pretty fresh, and had it been abeam she would hardly have stood it, for you see the heavy guns on her decks all meant weight in the wrong place the moment she began to heel over. But with the wind fair—it was for the most part almost dead aft—she carried the cloth as steady as a church, and romped along at what I should judge was eight knots good.

The chief mate, who, although he did not exhibit a particularly bold front at certain times, was undoubtedly a good and accurate navigator, and a clever practical seaman, went to the wheel-house and asked whether he should give her a greater press of canvas.

“She’ll stand it easily, so long as she’s going about as you have her now, though, if it came on to blow harder, or you wanted to haul your wind, we should have our work cut out to snug her down again. You see, she’s intended to be handled by a hundred or a

hundred and fifty men of a watch, and everything's a trifle heavy."

"Keep her as she is, then, Mr. Bardney," replied Macadam. "We'll just run along quietly as we are until we've got a good offing, and then we will haul our wind a bit to stand up the coast, and see if we can't get steam on her besides. Tell Ferguson he can have those four stewards and his own two mates, and must do as well as he can with them. I can't spare him a larger crew at present. But with that gang he'll be able to see if all things are ship-shape or not, and to warm his furnaces a bit, and get a few pounds of steam in her. Where's the boat those soldiers came aboard in?"

"Towing alongside from the foot of the gangway ladder. I haven't had time to see to her yet."

"She'll be swamped if she stays there till we get outside. See if you can't get her hoisted on deck. But if there's going to be any bother about it just cut her adrift."

The chief officer came out on deck again and gave orders for a whip to be rigged at the main yard-arm. Livrock came running up from the darkness with the requisite tackle in his hand. How he had got hold of it I couldn't tell, but I suppose his sailor's instinct showed him the exact place where such matters were to be found, and he had gone there without hesitation. However, be that as it may, he appeared with a tail-block and a coil of rope; and burdened with these swung himself into the main-rigging. Anxious to be

of use, I followed him, gained the top, and lay out along the ponderous yard. Arrived at the end, I seated myself a-cockstride and took the heavy coil of rope, whilst the third mate made the tail-block fast, feeling quite as safe as if I had been standing on the deck below; for the motion was easy and the iron tube I was straddling was as broad as a horse's back.

But of a sudden there came a change in the scene. The heavy vessel below me jarred, and came to an abrupt halt. The fabric of her spars and rigging swayed violently forward, and with a sharp "flick" I was shot clean off my perch.

I fell helplessly through the air, turning twice, and hit the water with my heels and sank beneath its surface amid a perfect bonfire of phosphorescent spray.

My wits, which had rather gone a-wool-gathering during that rapid transit through the air, returned to me the moment the stinging brine squirted up my nostrils; and being, as I said before, a very tolerable swimmer, it was not many seconds before I was on the surface again, wiping my eyes and spitting the water from my mouth.

Having no idea as to what had happened, I was much surprised to find the *Dodreda* still close beside me, and to all appearance motionless. Looking upwards I saw a line of anxious faces along the bulwarks, and away above them through the gloom the dim outline of Livrock's figure still at the starboard main yard-arm.

However, I did not stop still staring at them, but putting in some half-dozen of the strongest strokes I was capable of, brought myself up to the foot of the gangway ladder, and waiting till a swell lifted me, scrambled on to it.

The sergeant's boat was still riding to its painter; but it lay now at right angles to the white hull of the cruiser and was evidently no longer being towed. Then, and not before, did the truth dawn upon me. The *Dodreda* was hard and fast ashore

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE LINE OF FIRE.

REACHING the deck, I found Bardney and Bygott and their adherents once more a prey to all the tremors that the flesh is heir to, and Macadam, who had come out of the wheel-house, endeavouring to restore confidence.

The steamer was not quite without motion. Her stern rose and fell slightly on the gentle swell of the harbour. But her bows were fixed, showing that it was only forward that she was aground. Peter found that we had ten or twelve feet of water clear under our rudder-post, but that the keel forward had cut a groove five feet deep in the bottom; and a subsequent

examination with an armed¹ lead showed that the said bottom consisted of fine sand.

Macadam went into the chart-room for a minute, and returned.

“It is as I thought,” he said. “There’s five fathoms marked here, and we are on a bank that has been thrown up since the chart was made and not been marked in subsequently. Perhaps it isn’t even known. And in that case I’m just going to christen it Escape Shoal. However, we’ll content ourselves with being discoverers, and leave others to survey it thoroughly. The thing we’ve got to do now, is to get off as quickly as we can, and continue our voyage. Mr. Livrock, choose a crew, slip down into the boat alongside, and pull ahead. Peter, you go with him, and bring me accurate soundings of the water ahead. It may be we’re just on a ridge; and if that’s so, as I suspect it is, we shall be able to shove her over it. The tide’s rising, and she’ll soon work out a gutter for herself in the sand, with all this canvas drawing and the wind pressing her along. Besides, look there!” He pointed to a thin gray current of vapour that was drifting out of one of the smoke-stacks and floating away into the gloom. “Mr. Ferguson and his crew have not been idle. They’ve got steam draught on to the furnaces already, and we shall have the screws to help us soon.

¹ There is a hollow in the bottom of the hand sounding-lead which can be filled with tallow, so as to bring up specimens from the sea-floor. In the English Channel and the North Sea most of the coasters can form by this means a shrewd notion of their whereabouts.

However, if we can't drive her over, we must warp her back. There's a big kedge just abaft the mizzen rigging, Mr. Bardney; do you make all ready for hoisting it overboard and lowering it into a boat with a steel hawser ready for paying out. Handsomely does it, lads, so away you go."

I was turning to go and help, but the skipper called me back and added, "Bathurst, I want you too." When the others were out of earshot, "Look here," he said. "This is a big heavy vessel, and short-handed as we are, it's quite possible we sha'n't be able to make her budge. I shall spend an hour in trying; and if we can't manage it by then, it will be time to think of saving our skins in another way. So I want you two to go and get that whale-boat on the port quarter ready for sea, and provisioned and equipped as well as you can manage it. Rip the awning off, inspect her tackle, and be sure there's a compass on board. I will see to sextant, chronometer, and chart. Then get some water-breakers; you can collect them from the other boats—there's sure to be one or two in each; fill them and stow them under the thwarts. Then go below and bring up as large a cargo of canned things as you can find. She's a big boat, and the more you cram into her, in reason, the better. Now, off you go, and report to me when it is done."

Away we scampered. The whaler was in davits outboard, well secured and covered in. With our knives we quickly cut the lacings of the canvas awn-

ing, ripping and tearing it ruthlessly away. There were four oars laid along the thwarts at either side, and amidships were a couple of masts, with yards, lug-sails, and tackle complete. The rudder was shipped, a tiller lay on the grating, and there was a binnaced boat-compass, with lamps all complete, in a wooden box in the stern locker. The two plugs were lying beside their holes in the bottom, and these we wedged firmly into place. The sharp-stemmed craft possessed four small water-breakers of her own, and when we had filled these from a condenser tank in the forecastle we got four larger breakers out of the torpedo-launch which swung in the next davits; and with them crammed up to the bunghole we considered we had sufficient, and dived below to hunt for solids.

Being strange to the ship, we did not hit upon what we wanted all at once, and wandered impatiently through many snug living cabins and places filled with engines of destruction; but Bathurst, who had been using his nose as well as his other senses, hit upon a scent which, on being followed up, brought him to a door which proved to be that of a pantry and store-room. It was the remains of the officers' last night's dinner that caused the smell, a garlic-flavoured beefsteak-pie, from which we two snatched a good many hasty mouthfuls as we went in and out of that store-room with our burdens. There were bins full of tins, and we picked them out indiscriminately without so much as a glance at their labels. There

was no time to pick and choose; and as the whale-boat was eight-and-twenty feet long at the very least, and would sail none the worse for plenty of ballast, we determined to put the whole lot into her.

We had come below again for a fresh load—it was the tenth, if I recollect rightly—when there was a noise from above us such as heavy waggons make when they are passing over a rough stony road—a rumbling, in fact.

“Whatever’s that?” said I.

“Thunder, I’m afraid,” returned Walter, looking rather glum; “and that generally means lightning too. We shall find ourselves in an awkward mess if the night is lit up with that kind of lamp.”

“We shall,” I admitted, and departed deckwards with my load of tins. I had just scrambled on to the bulwark and was tumbling them into the floor gratings of the whale-boat when another peal rolled through the air overhead, and whilst the boom was still at its height, the heavens were divided by a jagged streak of light. The trim but complicated upper works of the cruiser showed their every detail in the intense bluey-white glare, and then a moment afterwards vanished from sight as though they had been hurled bodily into space; and, save for the thump of a sail or the hiss of the wind through the taut rigging, all was once more wrapped in gloomy silence. I turned to continue my work, but scarcely had I reached the head of the companion when another flash blazed out,

and again the scene was bathed in noonday light. The wavelets danced and glittered in the electric glare, and away half a mile on our port beam lay the embrasured walls of one of the forts. I had just time to note two or three faces gazing keenly in our direction when the darkness snapped down again, and once more all was hidden.

However, rightly judging that the captain's eyes could not have missed the view, I did not waste time by going to report it, but ran below again and went on with my work. If those on the fort had made out what had happened to the *Dodreda*, it was all the more reason why we should get the whale-boat fitted. We should be obliged to take to her now, and that too without much further delay.

The thunder-storm gained in strength and nearness as it went on, and the blackness of the night had almost disappeared before the constant discharges above. The rain had ceased, and there seemed every prospect of the brilliant display going on.

Too busily engaged in victualling the whaler, Bathurst and I missed the next scene of the drama. But it was narrated to us afterwards, and I give the account here in its place.

After the third flash a steam-launch came off from a jetty near the fort. The *Dodreda* was hailed and General Andarrez replied, but his answers were unsatisfactory and the boat returned. There might have been reason to hope that fear of killing or wounding

their own compatriots would have made the gunners in the fort withhold their fire, and try to capture or stop us by other means. But the commandant was evidently determined to prevent the *Dodreda* escaping to sea at all hazards; and as soon as the launch got back with her report, fire was opened.

The guns were Krupp breech-loaders, eight in number; but they were not of very heavy metal, nor were they very well or rapidly served. The lightning, after having discovered us to the enemy, had died away; and though doubtless they had accurately marked our whereabouts whilst the light lasted, when darkness once more involved the scene it would not have been easy to make sure of our position. So that, perhaps, is an excuse for the guns not being very accurately trained. But as the practice was more than good enough for our liking, you may be sure we did not grumble.

At first Macadam thought that the prisoners in the hold would prove our safeguard, and so held on still in hopes of getting the *Dodreda* off the shoal which pinned her. Livrock had reported that we were stuck on a narrow ridge, and that there were six and a half fathoms a dozen yards beyond the bows, and deepening water all the way ahead. The steam-gauge was going up, and Ferguson reported that in half an hour he could have the engines running at a fair rate of speed. And by her own movement and heavy weight, she was working herself a deeper channel

through the bank every minute. But when the first gun boomed out and sent a shell which burst on the armoured belt with a force that made the vessel reel, and a crash loud enough to split the drums of our ears, then the captain determined to desert her and trust to the whale-boat for making good our escape.

But this *dernier ressort*—as it seemed to us then—was ruthlessly torn away by the very second shot which reached us. Bathurst and I had just come on deck with another load of tins, he a little in advance. I saw him fall backwards, and there was a splintering crash. The two things seemed to happen in the same moment. Springing forward I leaned over him, expecting to find him dead. His eyes were closed, but after a moment or so's pause he opened them and inquired rather mistily what had happened. Up till then I didn't know myself, but a glance showed me. The shot had struck the whale-boat amidships, tearing through keel and timbers as though they had been so much paper. Her gunwales were still intact; but as I looked they bent, cracked, and broke. The whole of the cargo shot out into the sea below, and the two halves of the boat were left dangling from their tackles to the davits. The whale-boat was strongly built, and for pure destruction that shot stands out pre-eminent.

My chum was moving when I turned to him again, and after a bit of a struggle he sat up and began to talk, but still in rather dazed fashion.

"It must have been the wind of the shot," he said.

"I felt a kind of hard smack all over my body which drove me backwards, thump on to the deck, and then I don't remember anything more till—till—well, till about now. What's happened?"

I told him.

"Well," said he, scrambling on to his legs, "it's a bad business; but I suppose we'd better go and report to the skipper. He may want another boat got ready, though where the grub's to come from I don't know. We've about cleared out that store-room down to the boards— Whew!" he whistled a moment after, as another shell struck us somewhere on the broadside amidships and exploded with terrific din. "This is hot work. Shake hands, Frank. Perhaps we mayn't get another chance."

We exchanged a hand-grip, and then went forward as coolly and unconcernedly as we could manage to do under the circumstances.

Macadam was just giving the order to lower away the whale-boat, when Bathurst slipped up to his side and reported her destruction.

"Well," replied the captain, "I'm not altogether sorry for it. She was a slender reed to lean upon at the best. If the lightning came on again, as it very well may do, they'd sink her to a certainty inside three minutes. And even if we had got clear in her to-day, they would most probably have contrived to pick her up by daylight to-morrow. We must just devote our energies to getting the *Dodreda* off. The thing can be done, and

they know it in the fort yonder, confound them! It stands to reason they wouldn't blaze away at her like this if they thought she'd be here in the morning. Trust a man for trying to smash one of his own war-vessels to pieces, unless he thought it the only chance to prevent her falling into the hands of the enemy. Fittings and all, you must remember, she's worth little short of half a million of money; and a craft of that value, however strongly she may be built, makes an expensive target for heavy gun practice. If only we'd got a kedge out well ahead, and a warp brought to the steam capstan on the fore-deck, I believe we could heave her over now. But as it is we must wait. Every time a shot strikes she wallows and makes herself a deeper, broader channel in the sand. The pressure of her canvas is continual, and already she's forged ahead several feet. You can tell it by the way she moves. She's pinned just about under the fore-mast now. When there's a sufficient head of steam up I don't doubt but what we shall be able to force her over it. But the stokers are few, and for the most part inexperienced. Hullo! where's Mr. Bardney? Not bowled over, I hope. But there's no time to look for him now. Livrock, Bygott, and Peter, do you three go down into the stokehold and do what you can to help. Worse luck to it, there's sufficient work for six times your number. Musgrave, go into the conning-tower and light it up. Bathurst, slip below and tell Ferguson we'll have the steam steering-gear. Tell him I'll see that it's connected."

I departed and entered the fighting station made for the ship's commander. There were only incandescent lamps there. The vessel was lighted throughout with electricity; but at present the dynamos were not running. So I had to come out again, pass down the deck, and go below to the store-room where I knew there was a lantern. You can guess I didn't loiter on the way. There was the deep boom of a heavy gun every quarter minute or so, and the *whop, zip, ping* of a heavy rifle fire going on incessantly. The night was pitch dark again, and the fort was masked with smoke; but although the aim was for the most part bad, still there was enough destructive material flying around to make exposure dangerous. Indeed, as I was slipping back along the exposed deck as fast as my legs would carry me, a bullet actually severed one of the protecting bars of the globular lantern I was carrying, and so must have passed within a very few inches of my valuable body.

But I was getting pretty callous to it by then. At first I had been in a most unholy funk, and had inwardly sympathized with Bardney and Bygott, though managing not to show that same outwardly. The impact of heavy shot and shell has a very unnerving effect, especially if the amount of destruction they are capable of is brought once or twice forcibly under your notice. And you don't feel as comfortable under a rifle fire, however wild it may be, as you would under a hail-storm. You can't keep bullets out of your

carcass by turning your coat collar up. But "use is everything," as some one has said, and when I found that I didn't get killed in the first five minutes, the chances of a sudden end were to a large extent overlooked in the excitement that was tingling from my head to my toes.

Scarcely had I gained the protection of the conning-tower, when a heavy shell struck it. The shock sent me with a bang up against the opposite wall, and the explosion filled the little place with stinging smoke; but the steel-faced armour stood the test bravely, and when I had relit the lamp, which, though jerked from my hand, was luckily unbroken, there was nothing but a slight starring of the plates to show where the huge missile had struck. Inside that is; without there would be an ugly scar enough, but about that I did not trouble my head.

The walls of the conning-tower were circular, and about six feet in diameter. Above was a domed cupola of steel, and between it and the edge of the walls ran a narrow slit through which one could see what was going on outside. The place was full of forty different instruments, many of which were strange to me. There was the small steering-wheel amidships, and in front of it a binnacle fitted with a liquid compass. There was the engine-room telegraph and speaking-tube. There were half a score of other voice-tubes with brass plates attached, telling where each led to. And there were a lot of other things which were, as I have said,

beyond my comprehension. I did not bother my head to find out what they were then. I only gave the whole a cursory glance. My business was to light the binnacle, and all my thoughts and attention were engaged upon the best method to fix that dim oil-lamp so that its flickering rays might fall to most advantage on the compass-card.

The din without was loud and continuous, and leaden messengers were constantly knocking at the walls and door of my stronghold; but no other heavy shot paid a call, and the rifle bullets rattled as harmlessly against the outside of my casemate as so many dried peas would have done. One indeed slipped through the slit at the lower edge of the cupola; but it rattled its way out again at the opposite side, and as I happened to be leaning down at the time, my head didn't mar its trajectory.

When the globular lantern was fixed to my satisfaction, I stood up and looked through the slit. From one point of the compass I could see the dull blaze of the big guns and the tinier flashes of the rifles gleaming amongst the dense cloud of bluey-gray smoke; but all else was in murky darkness. My view was circumscribed to a horizontal plane, and as there was little of interest to be seen, I just sat down on the iron floor, so that if another bullet did chance to pop in, my head wouldn't be there to interfere with it.

There was absolutely nothing else to be done, and so I had to sit idly; but it was dreary enough work

waiting, and I envied anyone who had anything to occupy himself with. But Macadam had told me to stay where I was, and so I stuck there as stolidly as might be; but for all that the time dragged along very heavily.

After what seemed an age, the captain came in, with Bathurst at his heels.

“Well, Musgrave,” exclaimed Macadam cheerily, “had you begun to think yourself the only one of us left alive? We haven’t been under fire twenty minutes so far; but time passes rather slowly sometimes, doesn’t it? However, steam’s rising rapidly now. We only want eight pounds more to make up the limit Ferguson fixed upon—d’ye see the gauge?—and it’s jerking up pretty rapidly now. And then we’ll send her at it. Thanks to the hammering of those fellows ashore, we’ve got a pretty deep gutter beneath us now, and with a little extra persuasion we ought to wriggle through it. Wind and steam together, y’know, will make a powerful combination.”—He grasped the spokes of the steam steering-wheel and gave half a turn. The index in a little glass-cased quadrant fastened to the wall moved in correspondence.—“I shall have her under complete control from here. Wonderfully clever pieces of mechanism these war-ships, aren’t they? Hullo! There’s the steam-gauge up to its figure. Shout down to the engine-room, Bathurst, and ask if he’s all ready.”

My chum did as he was told, and reported, “All ready.”

"Then," exclaimed Macadam, with his ruddy face fairly purple with excitement, "now for it." He pushed down the upright handles of the engine-room telegraph till the indices pointed to "Full steam ahead" for both pairs of engines, and directly afterwards we felt the thud of the mammoth machinery away down under our feet.

At that moment a shot struck her on the turret forward; and a shell penetrating the secondary battery simultaneously, burst with a shock that hove the three of us off the floor. The *Dodreda* reeled almost on to her beam-ends, lurching upon the sand with her bilge. But the next moment she sank back on to even keel again, and the powerful twin screws did their work. Scraping and scratching along, she passed the ridge of sand beneath the whole three hundred and twenty feet of her length, and then leaving it altogether, bounded forward like a shot from a catapult.

Blinded by their own smoke, the gunners in the fort were for some time unaware of what had happened, and kept up their furious cannonade and rifle fire long after the target had gone; and when at last they found out what had happened, we had disappeared into the blackness, and they had not the remotest notion where to direct their missiles.

CHAPTER XVII.

AWAY TO SEA.

WE'RE clear of that infernal bank now, lads," the captain said, when the new motion told us that the vessel was in deep water once more. "That is, always supposing there are no more unmarked shoals. I thought I knew to a yard where I was when we bumped, and the sight of the fort proved to me I was right. There's deep water marked in the place, and the bank must have been thrown up recently. However, it's not likely that two such obstructions have cropped up, and so I think we may consider ourselves clear. I'm heading her west and by south—directly off the land, that is, and we'll hold on so for a day or two. The most natural thing for us to do would have been to stand on up towards Peru as soon as we had sufficient offing. But the Chilians will naturally think we've done that, and if they attempt any pursuit they will head on up that way and so miss us. If I'd only got the *Lynx's* crew now, and just a few more added, I wouldn't mind trying conclusions with some of 'em; but short-handed as we are, even a pursuit would be likely to go hard with us, although the craft has a pair of heels of her own as we've seen already. But she'd take a young army of stokers to make her do much more than the steady jog she's at already, and that's what we haven't got. However, this will

put the land under water by daybreak, for what with canvas and steam I don't suppose we're making much less than thirteen knots.

"Now I'm just going round to see what damage we've sustained. Bathurst, will you take the wheel, and keep her west and by south as she is going?"

"West and by south it is," replied Walter, coming round and dropping his hands on the spokes; and the skipper and I went out into the night, passing down below on to the gun-deck.

Two shells had burst in the secondary battery, and the destruction they had caused was something frightful. One, passing through a port beside the muzzle of a gun, had exploded against the carriage, and overturned it, ripping up the solid six-inch deck planks, splintering them like so much matchwood, and twisting the great girders above as though they had been pliable as copperwire. The other missile had bored its way through the iron skin, and exploding in its passage had blown out a hole big enough to drive a donkey-cart through. Not content with this, it had scattered fragments about which ploughed up the deck, and toppled over the gun just aft of it, so that the massive carriage lay on its broadside all twisted and broken. Going up to look at this at close quarters, I saw a sight that turned me rather sick. Pinned down on to the racer was a man with the lower part of his body hidden beneath the gun. I sung out to the captain, and though there was small doubt as to who it

was, bent down to make sure. It was the unfortunate chief officer.

"Poor Bardney!" said Macadam; "he was as good and plucky a sailor as ever handled rope or sextant, but he was not suited for this game, and showed it openly. He came down here to get, as he thought, into safety, and—well, poor fellow, he's got killed, and we won't say any more about it. Let us hope he is the only one. If this battery had been manned, there must have been an awful loss of life. But the most of our people were down in engine-room and stokehold, and she'll be heavily armoured round those, I expect, both from beam and raking fire. The engines are all right because they are running, and the boilers must be sound too for a similar reason. But I'll just slip down there to see if there are any casualties, and then look about to see what damage is done forward, and between wind and water. I want you to stay on deck and keep a look-out. If anything turns up, call me immediately."

He had to come on deck with me to get to the engine-room hatch, for there was no entrance through the water-tight bulkhead; but when he had gone below, I was left to patrol the decks as I pleased.

The wind was pretty fresh, but steady, and there was a fair drizzle on; but it was not too dark to see the entire length of the vessel from where we stood. The masts and spars and sails rose like great spectral figures into the wet gloom above, but so far as I could see, no

material damage had been done to them. There was a rope's-end streaming out here and there, and a couple of shrouds had been sliced through, but the ratlines held them more or less in their places. The yards being braced 'thwart-ships, the square sails had presented their feather-edges to the fort, and so had escaped puncture; but the outer jib, which lay fore-and-aft, was sufficiently like a fishing-net to let one judge what a state the other canvas would have been in had it presented its broadest mark.

But the artillery fire had played awful havoc with the decks and their fittings, and everything struck had yielded before the fierce hurricane of steel. Capstan, bollards, iron bulwarks, were overturned, wrenched away, crumpled like paper.

Besides the whale-boat a torpedo-launch had been struck by a heavy missile, which had burst within her fabric, and, as it seemed with fiendish malignity, had scattered engine, boiler, and fittings far and wide, and driven the planking from her timbers in a hundred different places. Of the other boats none were hopelessly damaged, but there was not one fit to swim. The rifle-fire had been sufficiently attentive to puncture their hulls with jagged white holes, which would take a good deal of patching before they were ready to resist the water.

I went aft and looked shorewards. No lights were to be seen. The wet blackness had blotted everything from view. Valparaiso, its harbour, and its venomous

forts might have been in the other hemisphere for anything my eyes told me then. And I heartily wished that it might never be my fate to see them again.

Pacing forward to the bows I took my stand on the heel of the bowsprit, and held there leaning against the fore-stay. On either beam and ahead all was blackness. Not a light was to be seen, and if there were any vessels near they were going, as we, darkly through the night. Below me the water was curling away from the ram in two faintly phosphorescent waves. The wind was off the land, and the steamer's motion was easy. She rose gently over the swells and swooped down again with a rhythmical precision. It was very soothing. It was more than twenty hours since I had closed my eyes, and during that time much had occurred. Whilst the excitement lasted I had never been more wakeful during my life; but now that it was all past and over I was beginning to feel uncommonly drowsy. My head nodded and nodded. I pulled myself together once or twice, but sleepiness was getting the better of me. However, during one of these lurches my nose came into violent contact with the unyielding wire stay, and roused thereby to a sense of the eternal fitness of things, I made up my mind that it would never do for the "man on the look-out" to doze, and so set about a brisk parade of the littered decks. I paced the fore-castle for a while, and then strolling aft looked in at the conning-tower. Macadam was there, and Walter had gone.

up from the hold and escorted to the deck; but when the last handful emerged from their prison there was a halt. A man amongst them stepped forward and said he was a Peruvian. He had been taken prisoner shortly before, and was incarcerated in the hold when his former captors were sent down to join him. And he had not found an opportunity to announce his nationality before. Besides which—here he hesitated a little—he had heard English voices, and had not known we were in the Peruvian service. He had thought we were fighting for our own hands. In fact, to put it bluntly, he believed we were pirates.

This last admission brought up a rather grim smile on one or two faces; but as the fellow's tale seemed to be true, he was told to fall out and stay on board, whilst his companions were passed on to join their fellow-countrymen.

The boat was pretty full, and there was not much room for them to move about in her; but they would make the shore, if they set their minds to it, before darkness came down, and the weather seemed likely to hold fair. So we lowered them away, watched them unhook the tackles, cast off the painter, and wished them a safe voyage. They dropped rapidly astern, stepped their masts, rigged the lug-sails, and commenced to beat in for the land.

"There," exclaimed Macadam, "I'm glad we've got rid of them. I feel more comfortable now. They were not pleasant passengers to have aboard. Besides,

it took one man's time to look after them, and, short-handed as we are, every pair of fists is of value. Now let's see what this new addition to our strength has got to say for himself."

The freed prisoner was brought up. He was a thin, straggling man, with bluey-black hair, sallow skin, and a smooth face. This last was not caused by a clean and recent shave. The man's cheeks and chin were constitutionally hairless. He was dressed simply in striped cotton shirt and coarse canvas trousers, and wore the usual sailor's belt and sheath, but the knife was missing. We were all inclined to be a bit suspicious of him at first, and there were not wanting whispers of "Chilian spy;" but as no one remembered having seen the man's face before, and as it was hard to see how a solitary individual like himself could plot successfully against the whole ship's company, we began to eye him less askance, and to think that he might not be a bad sort of chap after all.

Speaking in Spanish, of course, he explained that his name was Manuel Hernandos, and that he had been mate of a coasting schooner, which the cruiser had captured shortly before. His shipmates had been set ashore and allowed to go wherever they wanted to. He had been kept on board to give evidence about his vessel.

"But," objected Macadam suspiciously, "why did they keep you, and not your skipper?"

"Because," replied the fellow, "he was past speaking

when we were taken possession of. The schooner belonged to him; the cargo was his also. Freights were high, and he had ventured his all on the trip. He hadn't a dollar left beside. If all had gone well he could have retired from the sea, a rich man; but when this cursed cruiser fired a shot for us to heave-to, then my captain knew he was ruined, and swore that his schooner should not fall into Chilian hands whilst he was alive. Us he sent below, staying himself alone at the tiller; but soon we felt that she had come up into the wind, and peeping up on deck saw our captain's body lying there bleeding from a dozen shot wounds."

"Ah," replied Macadam, "looking back from this distance of time it seems a foolish thing enough; but I myself have had your skipper's feelings. Well, Hermandos, you are on a Peruvian deck again now, and you must make yourself useful."

"*Señor*, my life is yours."

Macadam laughed. "I hope that isn't a mere figure of speech," said he. "I want you to take your turn in the stokehold for the present. There, don't look blue. We've no regular stokers or coal-trimmers on board, so all hands have to do the work in rotation; and as you've had nothing special to occupy yourself with for the last few days, you ought to be comparatively fresh. Come, off you go."

The Spaniard, with no very pleased expression in his face, stepped below, and the skipper addressed the others. "Now the rest of you," he said, "just turn to

and see how much sleep you can cram into a matter of two hours. Then I will go below and take my spell, and after that we will square up a bit, divide ourselves into two regular watches, and set about doing things ship-shape and Bristol fashion. Musgrave, take the wheel; and Bathurst, I leave you in charge of the deck, and if the wind shifts or anything turns up let me know promptly."

The sleepy amateur stokers needed no second bidding, and vanished instantly. Macadam betook his big self down to the cavernous depths below, peeling off coat and waistcoat as he went. Bathurst began a promenade of the littered decks. I went into the conning-tower, and kept her bows pointing as nearly to E. and by S. as caution and the steam steering-wheel would let me.

It was well on to mid-day by this time, and the sun was burning over our mast-heads with remorseless blaze. Its fiery beams fell on the white-painted cupola of steel above, and made it hot enough to warm the hand. The air within the confined little space was stifling. I had stripped by degrees to trousers and vest, but the oven-like atmosphere caused even this scanty attire to be wringing with perspiration, and that from no physical exertion on my part whatever, for the wheel moved so lightly that the pressure of one finger would turn it easily. The other wheel-house would have been cooler and airier, but connections had been changed from it to the conning-tower when we were under fire from the

harbour fort, and there had been no time to alter matters since.

So things went on for about a couple of hours, when I heard a pattering of many feet along the silent decks, and a minute or two afterwards Bathurst stepped in from the white glare outside, evidently brimful of news.

"What's up?" I inquired. "Has the skipper made up his mind that all is clear now, and that we may as well head in for a Peruvian port without further delay?"

"Nothing so cheering, Frank. We aren't out of the wood yet. There's one of those pestilential torpedo-boats in chase, and she'll catch us up as sure as the Chinese made gunpowder."

"Whew! That looks bad."

"It does for somebody, either for them or us. There will be another brush, you may lay your thumb-nails on it. However, a stern-chase is always a long one, and we've another hour or two's grace yet."

"Is she far off then, Walter?"

"We haven't risen her from the deck yet. It was quite by a fluke I made her out at all. I had been stumping up and down the decks during my watch without seeing the vestige of a sail, steamer's smoke, anything. Getting rather tired of doing nothing, I thought I should like to see what had become of the cargo of prisoners we had cast off. They were invisible from the deck, and so I went aloft. The maintop didn't rise 'em, but the topgallant cross-trees did, and

there I saw the boat standing on inshore under her canvas, and something else besides which wasn't so pleasant. There was one of those long black torpedo-boats coming towards her from shorewards. I watched them draw near, and stay together for a while, evidently in consultation, and then saw the white boat stand in again for the shore and the black one turn her sharp evil nose out this way. There couldn't be the slightest doubt what she was up to, so I slipped down and reported to the skipper forthwith. Frank, I believe that man is positively overjoyed at the thought of another brush. He didn't say so openly, of course; in fact, he used language that was more forcible than repeatable; but his face belied his words, and his eyes fairly twinkled with delight. 'All hands' was called promptly, and whilst the rest of them were packed down below to get up a big head of steam again, the skipper took old Peter and the general off with him to the gun-deck. There are two of these big guns dismounted, as you know, on the port side, but that still leaves six in the battery, and they're getting them all loaded and ready to fire."

"If a shot from one of them manages to make a lucky hit—" said I.

"Then," replied Bathurst, finishing the sentence for me, "the action will probably come to an end at once. But if, on the other hand, they all miss their mark. which is quite possible, for there's a fine bit of sea running—"

"Why, then," said I, "the action is equally likely to be brought to an abrupt conclusion, for if we don't sink her, the odds are she'll sink us."

At that moment Macadam popped in.

"That torpedo-boat's hove-to," he said.

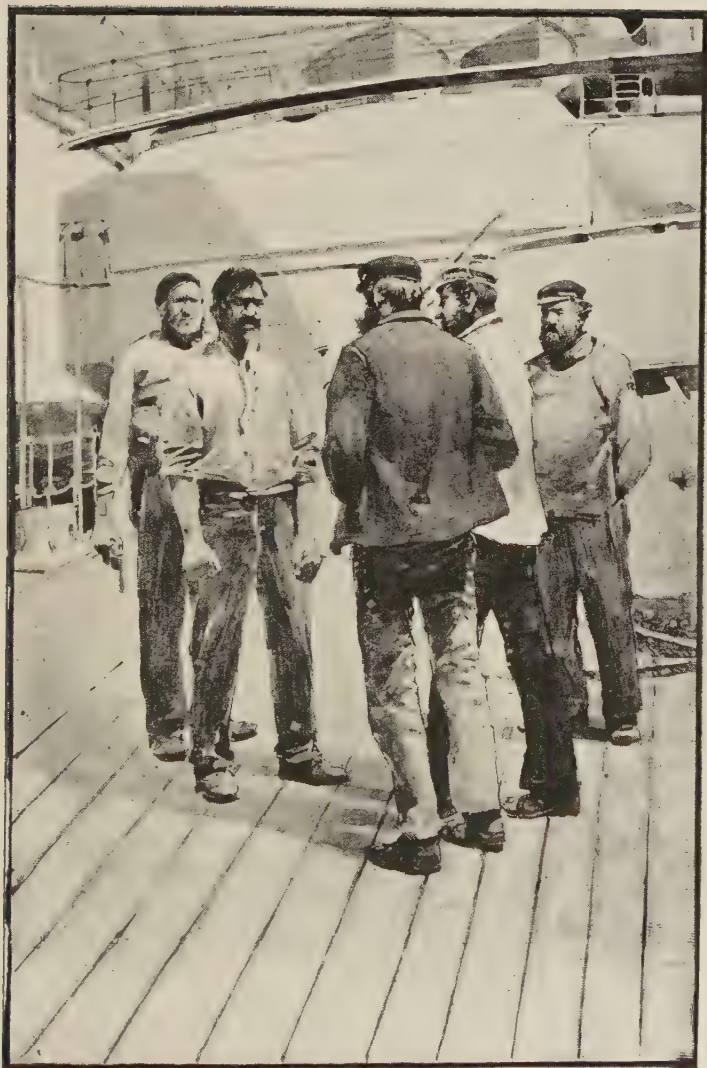
"What! given up the chase?" I exclaimed.

"No," he replied, "I'm afraid she's waiting for a consort, and the pair of them will come for us after dark."

CHAPTER XVIII.

CLEARING FOR ACTION.

MATTERS had indeed assumed a metaphorically azure tint. Day was wearing on, and the attack would doubtless now be made on us during the night-time. Properly manned, the *Dodreda* would have found herself in a tight place, and every man aboard of her—in engine-room, stokehold, fighting stations, and conning-tower—would have had to do his utmost. Then the odds would have been slightly in favour of the larger vessel. But as we were circumstanced at present, with not a tenth part of the men to keep her under full steam, supposing that none were withdrawn to work the guns, it seemed impossible that we could evade destruction. If the attacking boats could manage to come within range they would be able to launch



their terrible weapons unseen by us, and so we should be unable consciously to avoid them. The Whitehead torpedo leaves, as I have said, a track of bubbles behind it on the surface, which during the daytime serves to mark its course. But at night this silvery line would be, so I thought, invisible; and if the aim was true at the time of launching, we could not avoid being struck.

But, as my limited experience had already shown me, there is a vast deal of chance in warfare; and in modern warfare it seems to be the unexpected that mostly contrives to happen. So, comforting myself with this vague assurance, I dismissed any fears that would have thrust themselves to the surface, and made up my mind to take matters coolly however they might arrange themselves.

Meanwhile every soul in the ship was doing his utmost. Those in the stokehold were working like blacks—literally blacks, for they were one and all extremely grimy—working like blacks, I say, to make the most advantageous preparations possible under the circumstances. But few were engaged in heaving coal on to the glowing furnaces. The majority were bringing the black glistening lumps from the deep recesses of the bunkers, and piling them about on the corrugated iron floor-plates, so as to be all ready for the shovel when the critical moment came. Ferguson, leaving the ponderous engines to run by themselves, was far away from the little platform where lay the levers and

wheels and valves which governed and controlled the whole of the mighty powers. He was engaged right down amongst the tangle of machinery with slush-lamp, oil-can, and cotton waste, doing a greaser's duties which no other man could be spared to perform. Macadam, Peter, Bygott, and the little general were working like Trojans in the secondary battery, loading the massive guns, filling shells in the magazine, and bringing them and their corresponding powder-charges to a point where they could be easily got at when the time came to reload. The guns were all breech-loaders by Krupp of Essen, and received their charges through an aperture closed by a slide in the side of the breech. It was easy enough to open and remove this, and all that science could do to lighten labour was there; but in spite of this everything connected with the unwieldy weapons was of necessity heavy and ponderous. With full gun crews that battery would have contained a hundred and forty or a hundred and sixty men. With five, all that possibly could be spared—and Bygott, who was one of these, was by no means to be depended on—she was of course ridiculously undermanned. Indeed, to handle one gun at a time, and that slowly, was as much as they were capable of. Add to which, three of them were entirely unversed in what they had to do.

Our heaviest piece of artillery, that in the forward turret, was an absolute white elephant to us, and was left severely alone. If one man, instead of five-and-

twenty, had been needed to fight it, we could not have spared him.

Of our other defences, the machine-guns in the upper deck and superstructure would have to remain out of action for a like reason. But we had other weapons, whose position made them deadlier than these. I don't think I have mentioned it already, but the *Dodreda* was barque-rigged—that is, was square-rigged on her two foremost masts, and carried fore-and-aft canvas only on the mizzen. The mizzen-top-mast shrouds were stayed out to cross-trees alone; but at the fore and main mast-heads—lower masts, remember—were commodious platforms, hedged in by a stout iron bulwark. In modern parlance these are called “fighting tops,” and a machine-gun fired from them would pelt down on the decks of any craft which was near at hand. If there were men exposed, the result would be obvious; and even if there were not, the damage from a well-aimed, well-sustained fire would probably be great, for decks are not, as a rule, very heavily protected, although there are matters below them of the most vital importance.

The machine-guns with which the *Dodreda's* tops were armed—I am not going to give an advertisement to the firm who made them—were fed by cartridges strung on to a canvas belt; and it was in fitting the sockets of these belts with ammunition, which he brought up from the magazine below, that Bathurst was busily employed all the afternoon.

We possessed one other kind of destructive weapon on board. The *Dodreda* had two below-water torpedo-tubes, and two ports above the water-line¹ for the same purpose. But a torpedo is a dangerous thing to fiddle about with, if you don't understand it; and, with the exception of Macadam, nobody on board had ever handled one in the whole course of his life. And, in addition to this, the same argument held which kept the turret-gun silent—our unfortunate paucity of numbers.

Then all the canvas was taken off her, an operation which the steam-winches materially aided. For Captain Macadam had determined to fight his ship under steam alone.

When all preparations that we were capable of had been gone through, and the ship was as much "cleared" and "ready for action" as she was going to be, Macadam took over the wheel from me, and being in the conning-tower, where every contrivance was close at hand, had ample means of communicating with every portion of the vessel.

"Now, Musgrave, my lad," said he, "I think that you and Bathurst are a pretty plucky couple, and so I'm going to station you both in a place where, if these misdirected torpedo-boats open out on us with their

¹ In actual warfare nowadays an above-water torpedo-tube would never be used. Under the heavy machine-gun fire, which most certainly must obtain throughout a modern naval action, the missile would almost certainly be exploded before it was launched, with the effect that the vessel which tried to fire it would be hoist with her own petard.

machine-guns, you'll get it hotter than anyone else in the ship."

"It's comforting to know that beforehand," said I.

"Of course it is; and I most sincerely hope you won't get bowled over. But that you'll have to take your chance of. Now listen to these instructions, and mind to let none of them slip out of your head. We shall have night down upon us soon; and as soon as we are thoroughly covered up, I shall put my helm hard down, and run away to s'uth'ard with the wind abeam. Having no sail-trimmers to spare, that was one reason why I got canvas off her, and the other was that under bare poles she wouldn't be so easily seen from a distance. If this manœuvre humbugs the enemy, so much the better for somebody. But if they keep too sharp a look-out to let us go, and seem bent on coming up, why then, give 'em the search-light, and pepper 'em with those machine-guns as soon as they come within range. That's another thing I've put you and Bathurst up there for. You've some sort of notion of squinting along a gun-barrel, and ought to do more execution than either of my mates, or Peter, for instance. As to the search-light, Ferguson will have the dynamo running directly you tell him to; and all that has to be done then, is to switch on the current and slew the barrel round in the direction you want the beam to go. Examine the thing when you get up there, and you'll see it's all simple enough.

"Mind, now, don't give 'em the search-light till you

think there's no chance of their missing us; and directly you do it—if you are compelled to, that is—shout down to me promptly. In fact, I want you to keep me posted in what's going on the whole time, and especially if there's any firing on our side; for remember the smoke will clog my view here, and you may be clear up there. Now, I think that's about the lot; but if you're not clear on any point, don't be afraid to ask."

"No, captain," said I. "I think I understand it all. There's one thing, though. Is it best to fight on an empty stomach? I haven't had a scrap to eat since a mouthful I managed to swallow whilst we were victualling that whale-boat last night."

"Bless me, what a ravenous warrior it is! Yes, cut off and fill your stomach, and put something in your pocket for Bathurst. And, I say! Hi! wait a minute! Musgrave! Ah! here you are. What a precious hurry you're in! Whilst you are at it, just bring me something too. I'm beginning to feel that I have eaten nothing for a month at the very least."

"Whisky and soda, iced?" said I, knowing the skipper's weakness.

"Get out, you rascal, and bring anything, only mind there's a lot of it. Don't forget the solids; but if you can lay your hand on a bottle of Scotch, just pour me out a second-mate's nip, and don't be stingy over it."

Scotch whisky was out of the question, but I brought a square-faced bottle of Hollands, which I thought would probably suit him, and some beef and

biscuit; and then returning, loaded myself with a bottle of claret in one pocket, as many biscuits as I could stow about my person, a tin of corned beef and a couple of bottles of soda-water, and then went to the main-rigging, and with much care and difficulty climbed into the top.

Bathurst was just finishing his preparations, and his eye brightened perceptibly when he saw the nature of my burdens.

"The commissariat's been neglected sadly so far," said he. "I haven't been feeling very bad till now; but the sight of that grub has made my tummy begin to yell through sheer emptiness. Of course you haven't brought a can-opener! Oh, good chap, better still, you've slit the edges of the tin beforehand. Here, empty the stuff out on the floor. It's rather dirty, but it's no use being particular about minor details. Bread? Oh, biscuit; that'll do. There goes the top of the claret-bottle. H'm, claret tastes rather like ink; but it's wet, and that's the principal thing wanted. Wash it down with soda-water, and you'll never be any the wiser."

Chatting lightly thus, we consumed our dinner, supper, or whatever you like to call the meal, with great gusto, taking occasional glances over the edge of the top to scan the round horizon. The two torpedo-boats had joined company, and were holding on steadily in our wake, about two miles astern; and it was evident, from their hanging always in the same relative

position with regard to the cruiser, that they did not intend to attack her before dark. This was judicious on the part of their commanders, though it did not seem to improve our chances of ultimate escape. But as we were unable to remedy this, we didn't trouble our heads particularly about it, and went on with our meal comfortably, and without useless agitation of mind.

The long sea-day had waned, and night was approaching. The sun, red and bloated, trembled amid a gauze-like haze over the western horizon, dyeing the waters with a dull scarlet, and the low banks of clouds above with pinks and purples. Over our heads, not far as it seemed above the trucks, were heavy masses of dark-gray vapour, rolling in our direction, and slightly outstripping us in pace.

Looking at these, Bathurst said he thought we should have rain before the night was through, and I took the opportunity to impart the instructions which the skipper had given me.

"Well," said he, when I had finished, "we may as well overhaul these search-light lamps—clumsy-looking arrangements, aren't they?—so that we shall know how to handle them in the dark in case they are needed. But it's my private opinion at present that the rain will come down on us, and the skipper will contrive to give 'em the slip when the weather's too thick to see far. He's a canny man, that same Macadam; and if anyone can do it, he's the individual. Meanwhile

there's no reason for us both to keep awake. We may as well snooze for a bit in turns, so as to come up fresh when the row begins, if ever it does. I'll toss you for first 'watch below.' Your call."

"Tails."

"'Tisn't."

And without more ado he stretched himself out on the floor of the top, and in less than a minute was sound asleep.

CHAPTER XIX.

TORPEDO-BOATS AGAIN.

BATHURST had enjoyed an hour and a half of sleep when I roused him to exchange places with me. Before I turned in, the night was clear, and the two torpedo-boats were plainly visible in their places, two miles astern. When he woke me, the night was thick as a hedge with driving rain.

"Macadam's starboarded the helm," he said, "and we're going south as fast as she can steam. He's just shouted up through the speaking-tube for us to be sure and keep a bright look-out, and there's too much depending on them for one pair of eyes to be relied upon when two are available. So I routed you up."

"All right!" said I, and commenced peering into the darkness. The rain was driving in on the port side in

a dense thick mist. I could discern most parts of the ship; but save for the dim outlines of the nearest waves, nothing was visible around her save thick, wet blackness. Whether the torpedo-boats had noted our ruse, and shifted their helms accordingly, or whether they had held straight on, I could not tell. Nothing but the white beam of the search-light at my elbow could pierce the murkiness of the night, and to turn it on would be to instantly betray our exact position, whether they had guessed its whereabouts before or not.

The time dragged by with terrible slowness, and our eyes ached with forcing them to stare through the driving rain. Neither of us possessed a watch, but Macadam, who kept shouting up the speaking-tube to make sure, I suppose, that we were on the *qui vive*, told us every now and again what o'clock it was.

We had more than one false alarm, seeing phantoms of the mist, I suppose, which our excited brains at first mistook for the hostile torpedo-boats; but as the night wore on, and we got more accustomed to the work, its very monotony checked these feverish outbursts, and we roved our eyes from side to side mechanically, and without imagination.

"*Th-e-w-w-w!*" came the whistle of the voice-tube, and then the question, "All awake there?" in the skipper's unmistakable tones.

"All awake it is!" I shouted back, being nearest the tube. "And all's well so far. What time is it?"

"Just four bells.¹ Keep your eyes well skinned."

"Well skinned it is," I responded, replugging the tube, and turning once more to scan the night.

"I don't think it's quite as thick as it was," observed Bathurst.

"Maybe not; but it's quite misty enough for all practical purposes. I don't believe we could see one of those blessed torpedo-boats if she was within a hundred yards of us at this minute; though, on the other hand, she couldn't see us."

"Which," Walter added, "is what we're aiming at. No, you're right; unless she showed— Great Jones! what's that?"

A blinding flash of light had suddenly shone into our eyes, dazzling us with its brightness, and then disappearing and leaving us momentarily confounded by the darkness.

"Lightning," said I.

"No, it wasn't," returned my companion excitedly. "Look there! it is sweeping away over the waves to windward, a long thin beam of light. Ah! now it has stopped, and is coming back again."

The beam of light swung back again, overshot the *Dodreda* by a hundred yards or so, and then dancing back again settled on her unsteadily. Whence it came we could not see. All that was visible was an intensely white star of light, which shone and glowed far away down the very middle of the luminous beam. But we

¹ Two o'clock.

were able to make a correct deduction. The white rays flickered and wavered over us. They were projected from some vessel at a distance, whose pitchings and rollings would be greatly magnified by the long leverage. We were exposed to the glare of an electric search-light. It came from one of the hostile torpedo-boats. She and her consort, finding that they had missed the trail, had set about quartering the ocean, and nosing it, so to speak, with their search-lights till they lit upon the scent again. Then the successful one would give tongue—flash a message, that is—the other would return to her, and the pair of them would continue the chase.

The whole matter was clear, and Bathurst slipped down below to give a full report to the captain, and to get any final instructions he wanted to give.

My companion was not long away. "The skipper says we are in for it now," he observed, "whether we like it or not. Now that those beggars have hit off our direction again they aren't likely to lose it. He isn't going to try and avoid an action any longer. But, on the other hand, he is not going to heave-to or even slacken speed, so as to help them to come up with us. In daylight we shall have a much better chance, and, as it's about five bells now, that will come in about another hour. The enemy will know this, of course, as well as we do, and they will doubtless try to come within range under the mask of darkness. The skipper's instructions are simple. We are to give 'em

the search-lights at once, and the machine-guns as soon as they are within range. He will let the general and his crew in the 'tween-decks battery know when it is time to begin big gun practice."

I sung out down the voice-tube to Ferguson to set the dynamo running; and when he replied that it was under-weight, I switched the current on to the carbons, and instantly had a glare of five thousand candle-power pouring through the glazed end of the metal cylinder at my elbow. Directed towards the mizzen-mast head, it lit up the depths of space for a moment or so; but being fitted with a universal joint, it was quickly trained down by Bathurst's hands into the required direction.

Armed with a pair of powerful night-glasses, I bent my gaze on the illuminated disc of distant ocean. Half a minute afterwards Walter was asking me what I was laughing at.

"Why," said I, "it looks for all the world like a magic-lantern show. There's the round disc on the sheet, edged in with blackness. On the disc are waves which move vertically, and on the waves are two long black vessels, which move up and down and sway about, but always stay in the centre of the picture."

Bathurst caught the idea, and the two of us roared in concert.

In the midst of our merriment there came Macadam's loud sea-bawl from below: "What are you two young fools up to now?"

Bathurst told him.

“Just attend to your duty, and don’t play the giddy ass like that, or else I’ll send you down to stoke the boilers, and put a couple of other men up there in your places. D’ye hear?”

“Ay, ay!” Bathurst sung out, and then *sotto voce* to me, “Whatever makes the skipper so crusty? Has he taken it into his head to be a martinet I wonder, and to consider merriment before the enemy smacks of lax discipline?”

We ruminated over this point for a minute or two in rather sulky silence. Then came a whistle at the voice-tube. I removed the plug, and placed my ear at the funnel.

“I say, you lads,” came up in Macadam’s unmistakable tones, “I’m sorry for savaging at you just now, but I had Bygott in here imploring me to surrender. He’s in fear of his life, and thinks we haven’t a chance. I told him I was commander of the *Dodreda*, and intended to beat those torpedo-boats off or be sunk. He said that he’d take no share in the fighting, but would go somewhere—I don’t know where—out of harm’s way. I retorted that if he disobeyed my orders I’d pistol him on the spot. At that moment you kicked up your hullabaloo, and partly because I was out of temper, and partly just to show him I intended to be obeyed implicitly all round, I sung out to you to stow your row.”

“Somebody’s going to be killed during these next

few hours," observed my companion after I had handed on Macadam's message. "Well, if we don't hit remorselessly when we have the chance, they'll cook our goose for a certainty. Here, Frank, you relieve me at the search-light. I'm a better hand than you are with the machine-gun, and I want to see that the belts are all ready for running through. It won't do not to have all our slaughtering tackle in perfect readiness when the proper moment comes to use it."

The two torpedo-boats were approaching us rapidly. They were steaming on one behind the other, and apparently making a very wet passage of it, for their freeboard was so low that their decks were constantly being washed by the seas, and their entrances were so fine, and their speed so high, that they mostly selected short cuts through the larger waves in preference to the longer and drier course over them. Under the influence of the beam sea, we, with the enormous weight of our armament high above the centre of gravity of the vessel itself, were rolling pretty heavily; but the movements of the *Dodreda* were nothing to those of her pursuers.

Advancing as they were directly in our wake, none of our guns could be brought to bear; but when the pursuers were within three-quarters of a mile, Macadam shoved his helm a-weather, and the action commenced. One after another the four guns of the starboard battery thundered forth, each discharge making the cruiser quiver to the trucks. From our eyrie we

could watch the course of the missiles. Not one struck the mark. Only one was true in direction, and that, plunging in the water twenty yards ahead of the leader, ricocheted over both boats and disappeared in a fountain of spray a quarter of a mile astern. The boats being end-on presented a small target certainly, but the practice could not be recorded as good for all that.

Macadam swung the vessel smartly round on to her own course again, with the uncomfortable knowledge that he had wasted time, and had unloaded four of his guns, without having gained any advantage whatever in return. However, whilst the occupants of the 'tween-decks battery were recharging their pieces, Bathurst brought his weapon into action. Mounted at the leeside of the top, he could only fire it when the vessel's stern yawed to port, for at other times the mizzen-mast was directly between him and the enemy. But when for a few seconds his range was clear, the gun belched out its tearing volleys of chilled steel with deadly rapidity.

In my mind's eye I can see Walter now, holding the training-piece of the gun to his shoulder with one hand, keeping his other thumb ready to press the trigger-catch, and squinting along the sights utterly regardless of all else that was going on around him.

At the first volley of this new sort of salute, the sternmost boat drew up abreast of her consort, and with a couple of machine-guns, which each had mounted on deck just between conning-tower and foremost smoke-

stack, they opened a return fire on us. Their practice was very wild, many of the bullets *shlupping* into the water alongside, and singing over the mast-heads above us. But the number fired was so great that some could not very well help coming nearer. Indeed, a sufficient quantity peppered around us to make the position unpleasantly warm.

"Try and use a bit straighter powder, Walter," said I after this had been going on for about five minutes. "There's one shot just gone through the search-light tackle here and missed my hand by a quarter of an inch."

"Miss is as good as a mile, Frank, any day," he returned, looking up from the gun and stretching out his arm as if to rest it. "Is the concern smashed?"

"No, there's a bit of the glass splintered and a neat hole has been bored in the end wall, but no vital part was touched. But I say, Walter, go on with your shooting, do. If you don't contrive to get them, they'll bag us for a certainty."

The distant crackle of their firing was incessant all the time.

"Mizzen-mast's in the road, Frank, and so I can't fire. No more can they to any effect. They're only wasting cartridges, and making their gun-barrels red-hot. That beautiful light of yours is dazzling them, and they can't see what they are up to. Wait till our stern swings up again, and I'll brown 'em."

At the next discharge he did "brown 'em" to such

good effect that the fire from one boat ceased abruptly, and then devoting all his attentions to the other, he made matters so hot that I saw two of the men who were working the gun on her deck incontinently turn tail and bolt down the hatchway for snugger quarters below, leaving a couple of others *hors de combat*.

At this period of the action the pursuing boats diverged from one another, evidently intending to come up one on either beam. Yawing slightly to one side and then to the other, we popped off a couple of our heavy guns at them again without effect.

Directly afterwards came a hail from the conning-tower:

“Maintop there!”

“Hullo!” I answered.

“Are you both sound?”

“Yes, thanks; so far untouched.”

“That’s well. I’ve been shouting through the tube and got no answer. Thought you were knocked on the head. Overhaul the tube and see what’s wrong with it.”

It was shot through, but Bathurst had opened fire again, and his gun was kicking up such a row that my voice couldn’t travel. He ceased firing again for a minute to fit on a fresh belt of cartridges, and again the hail came from below.

“If both boats get abreast of us together we shall be done. Stick to the port one till I signal to you with the steam whistle, and then turn search-light

and gun against the other, and concentrate all your energies upon her."

The torpedo-boats were romping up now under full steam, and there was no doubt that we were in hideous danger. Bathurst was pounding away at the port one, not firing wildly, but snapping off a few shots whenever he could line her deck or hull, and although most of the projectiles seemed to glide off from her protective covering, we were in hopes of getting one through somewhere into a vital part.

But suddenly the deep diapason of the steam fog-horn boomed out, and the signal was evidently for others as well as for us. For scarcely had I brought the search-light to bear when crash! crash! crash! crash! went the heavy guns of our starboard broadside.

Instantly the air below was filled with blinding smoke; but up with us in the top it was fairly clear. Startled by the discharge of that terrible artillery, we saw the torpedo-boat swerve at the first report, and slacken speed at the second. But the third shell hit her just abaft of 'midships and exploded with a terrific report. What the damage was we could not see, as dense clouds of hissing steam hid everything from view. But as it was evident that we were dropping her astern, I hailed the conning-tower during a lull. "Torpedo-boat to leeward out of action."

Macadam asked for no details, but replying, "Give it to the other, then," evidently proceeded to transmit suitable orders down below.

Round came search-light and machine-gun. By this time the bank of powder smoke which had masked the *Dodreda* entirely from view on both sides had cleared off from the weather-side, and to my horror I saw the bubbling track of a torpedo which would infallibly intersect with our course in ten seconds if we held on as we were. I was in the act of shouting down the news when Bathurst opened fire afresh, and my words were drowned. I seized his arm, made him desist, and yelled down my momentous news. But the delay was fatal. Before the cruiser's course could be changed in the least, there was a roar and a shock which made the vessel tremble all over and heel to her very beam-ends. I looked ahead. A huge pyramid of water had risen in the air, and falling had partly deluged our weather fore-decks.

"They've got us now," said Walter grimly, "and so I'm just going to see if I can't get them as well."

Clapping his shoulder to the machine-gun, he fired as one who knows the time at his disposal is short. The effect of the concentrated hail of projectiles soon made itself apparent. There was a vicious hissing as of ten thousand vipers sending their voices through one tube, and the steam burst out of the torpedo-boat's decks in gray scalding clouds. Our messengers had torn a way into her boilers, and she was dropping helplessly astern. We were free from the pair of them.

But at what cost had our victory been gained?

CHAPTER XX.

THE TIDINGS OF AMOS POWER.

A BULLET had perforated the search-light cylinder, as I have said before, and perhaps this may have jarred up the mechanism slightly. The shock of the great explosion disturbed it further. I think it was the automatic adjusting arrangements of the carbons which went wrong, for after that great upheaval the light kept jumping and flickering, and sometimes going down to a mere red glow. The attacking torpedo-boat was so close that her black hull loomed clearly through the night, and Bathurst was able to direct his pitiless fire without my aid. When the boiler was perforated she lost way immediately, and we began to drop her astern. Poor wretches, half her crew were probably parboiled.

The action was practically over now. By the fitful glare of the search-light, which blazed up brightly at times, I could make out our two late assailants lying helplessly on the trough away on either quarter. On the turtle-back of the fore-deck of the lee boat were eight men waiting till the scalding steam, which was still hissing up from amidships, should have blown itself away. Why the others of her complement were not there we could not be certain, but their absence was grimly suggestive. The boat to windward was

entirely hidden behind a billowing halo of mist, and we could see nothing of her at all.

The salt smell of powder-smoke still hung in the air, but it was dying away. Bathurst, who was black as a coal-heaver, was leaning back against the edge of the top, and wiping the perspiration from his face with a grimy fore-arm. The action was over.

There was a pattering of feet on the deck below. Called from his post by the captain, Livrock had rushed up from the secondary battery, and was going forward to report on the damage. On his verdict all our fates would depend. Having received no order to move, Bathurst and I stayed where we were, although our work was done. Indeed, now that the excitement was past, we were both sore and faint with exertion, and little inclined to bestir ourselves unnecessarily. I tied a strip torn from my shirt round my companion's left thigh, which had been grazed by a bullet—he hadn't noticed it, by the way, till I called attention to a blood-stain on his breeches—and then we set ourselves down to rest and recover wind.

Presently Livrock returned to the deck and delivered his report to Macadam in the conning-tower. What he said we couldn't hear, but when he came out again and headed for the companion, we hailed him for the news.

"Oh, she's as sound as a bell. There's a bit of a bulge in her side, and two frames are bent in a trifle, but the rivets have all held, and there's no plate started. She doesn't leak a drain,"

"Then how—" I began; but saying "No time now," he turned away and went below.

"That must have been a poor sort of torpedo, Walter," I remarked.

"I don't think so. It was strong enough, or it couldn't have raised that huge column of water. But it couldn't have hit us fairly; in fact, I'm inclined to think it didn't hit us at all. It must have exploded by some means or other before it reached our side."

Presently Macadam hailed us to come down. When we reached the conning-tower we found Andarrez there holding forth excitedly. "It was a miracle," he was exclaiming. "I am sure of what I say. Your sailor Pedro and I were both looking out through the port and saw the pieces floating by. They had been crumbled to match-wood, but from the great quantity strewn around, the piece of wreckage must have been of large size. Still I tell you, *Señor* Macadam, it was no less a miracle for all that. There might not have been such another piece in a hundred square leagues of this great Pacific, and yet the saints placed this floating fragment to be our bulwark and defence when nothing else could have saved us from annihilation. Another yard nearer and the *Dodreda* would have been involved in the explosion. But as it was the torpedo was sprung in such a manner that our vessel's plates are only dented, to remind us forcibly how narrow has been her escape."

"Well, general," returned the skipper, who was a

Presbyterian, "it was a big slice of luck for us any way, saints or no saints. But there always has been a huge element of chance in naval warfare, and, despite modern scientific improvements, there always will be. Still, I must confess to never having heard a previous instance of an attack by Whiteheads being frustrated by floating wreckage. It may occur again, of course, but I don't think it is an item which any commander will ever be able to take into his calculations."

"Our religions are different, *señor*," replied the little Peruvian, with stiff bow, "and so you do not see the cause of the intervention as I do."—He crossed himself.—"But you will not allow these torpedo-boats to escape, will you? We shall have daylight in a few minutes now, and you will be able to sink them at a long-range shell-fire without fear of their retaliating."

"That, General Andarrez, I most certainly shall not do," retorted Macadam. "My commission seems rather an irregular one so far. I allowed myself to run away with the *Dodreda* partly in retaliation for having my own ship taken away from me. And when her former owners sought to retake her I didn't scruple to beat them off with the only methods—and they were rough ones—available. But I don't feel justified in capturing them."

"Sink them, then."

"Again, no; I don't want to be bothered with prisoners, general."

"You need take none, captain."

“What! you’d have me leave them to drown like so many rats? Well, general, that may be a Peruvian idea, but it’s against British notions altogether. We do our best to break the enemy’s head whilst we’re fighting with him, but after the row’s over and we’ve licked him fairly, we always make a point of providing him with sticking-plaster. There now, *señor*,” he went on, seeing that the little general was going to make further demur, “we’ll drop the subject, if you please. We shouldn’t agree on it; and I, being in command of this ship at present, intend to have my own way.”

Whereat the Peruvian soldier flung out of the conning-tower in a furious passion, and the captain turned to us with a grim smile.

“Bloodthirsty little mosquito, isn’t he? That’s the worst of them. They’re all like that in these seas. Their notions of fair-play are very different to ours. They think that if you get a man down you should jump on him till he’s dead, and then there’s no chance of his getting well again and turning up to hit you a second time. The notion has its good points, but we Britons are so peculiarly constituted that we can’t see the particular beauty of them. But, to return to the present, or rather to the immediate past, I congratulate you two on the part you played in the action. You stuck to your post splendidly under a heavy fire, and silenced the two guns that were opposed to your one. And further, if you hadn’t put that weather-most torpedo-boat *hors de combat* she’d have had

another try at us, as sure as wasps can sting more than once. So if ever there is an official report sent in of this morning's work, you may rely upon my giving you both brilliant notices."

Fifty hours had elapsed, and we were heading to the northward under easy steam. The wind, what there was of it, was against us. By taking short alternate watches on and off duty we had all got fairly rested by this time, and orders had been given for all hands that could be spared from engine-room and stokehold to turn-to and get the cruiser as ship-shape again as our limited powers were capable of.

There was a good deal that was beyond us. We could not remount those two dismounted guns on the starboard side of the 'tween-decks battery, but we secured them so that they wouldn't fetch way in a heavy sea and do further damage. Similarly we had no means of properly repairing that huge wound which the exploding shell had bitten in the ship's side, but with plank and tarpaulin we gave it a good extempore patch. Then, after heaving overboard all the splinters and other riff-raff with which the decks were strewed, and making good a few ropes that had been shot away, we desisted from the task and took the rest for done.

It was just about one bell on this day that we sighted a vessel coming towards us. She was bows-on and we could only rise her fore-royal from the

deck; but Peter went aloft and reported that she would pass a little outside of us. Being end-on, he could not be quite sure of the matter, but he thought she was a barque, and by the general cut of her he made out that she was English.

"Good!" said Macadam. "We'll speak her and see if she can't give us some news."

We approached one another rapidly, and rose the stranger foot by foot till she was all visible from the deck. She bore away a point or two on first seeing us, but as we promptly altered our course to correspond she stayed as she was, evidently concluding that if we wanted to come up with her she couldn't prevent us.

On she came, now showing a couple of yards of black bow above the wave, now ducking down again and heaving a white-crested surge sturdily away before her. She was a small barque of some four hundred tons, under all plain canvas, a lumbering old wooden craft with weather-beaten sides and stained and patched canvas. Being deeply laden, she laboured like a log in the seas, and heralded her approach by a groaning of timbers and a squeaking of gear. As she drew closer another of our senses woke up to the fact of her presence, and many were the curious sniffings of the green hands who didn't know about such matters. The odour that was wafted to us was pungent, penetrating, and mighty unpleasant; but without Peter's explanation I should never have guessed what it was.

After screwing up his creased and wrinkled muzzle

as though he enjoyed it, he vouchsafed to deliver himself of the following remark:—

“Gewhanner ain’t no wiolets in this ’ere climate. Only know o’ one cargo what’s worse. That’s ’ides an’ gewhanner mixed. Sailed in comp’ny wi’ that once, an’ we thought the stink ’ud ha’ lifted the ’atches off’n ’er.”

As the clumsy old barque squattered past, Macadam, who was on the bridge, hailed:

“Barque ahoy! what barque’s that?”

A fat neckless man leaned over the gray sea-bleached bulwarks and roared back a reply in tones like those of an angry bull.

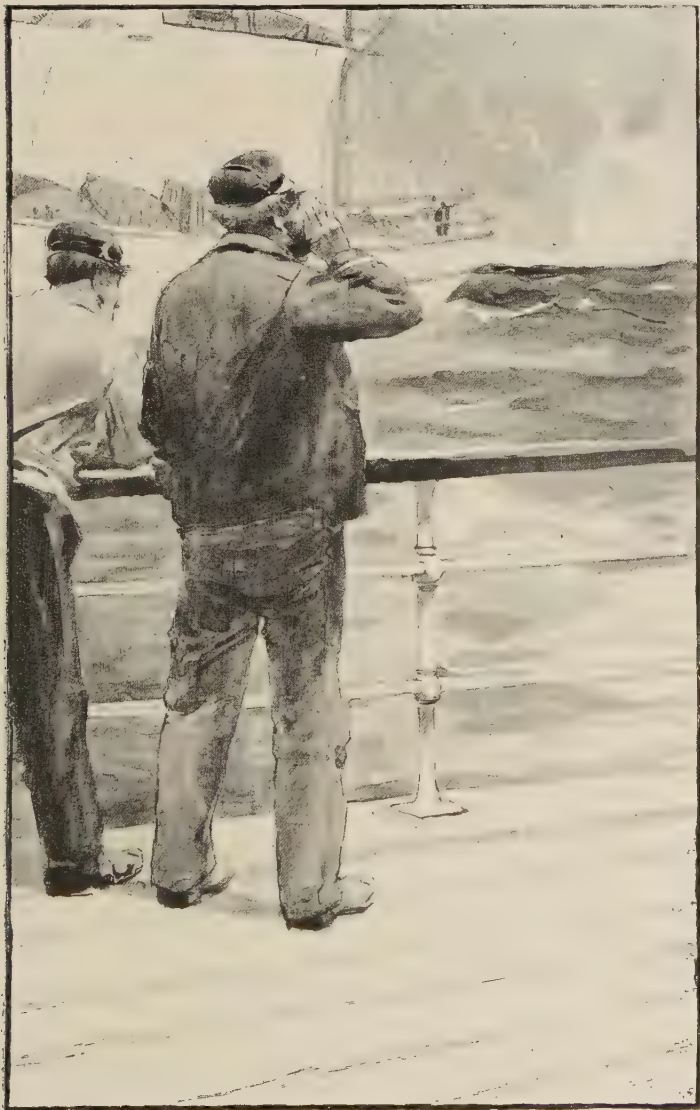
“British barque *Amos Power*, port o’ Liverpool, Amos Power master, laden with guanna. Five days out of Callao, bound ’ome. What vessel’s that?”

“Peruvian war-ship *Dodreda*. Captain Macadam in command. How are ye, Amos? We haven’t met for ten years at least.”

“Blame my cats!” replied the old fellow in a hoarse grumble that was evidently half soliloquy. “’Ere’s a rum go. Jock Macadam skipperin’ a Peruvian cruiser. Well, may I never!” Then in louder tones, “Ten year! It’s nigh on twelve now. Are ye in a hurry to make a passage? I’d like to have a bit of a jawbation if y’aren’t.”

“No,” said Macadam, “I’ll bring-to.”

“Will you lower a boat an’ come aboard o’ me? You’re stronger-handed than I am. I’ve only ten men of a crew all told.



"Haven't got a boat that will swim, unfortunately."

"Hallo! been in the wars? Blame my dogs, yes, so y've. Well, all right, I'll get my punt in the water."

He turned round and we heard him issuing orders to his scanty crew, and helping to carry them out with his own hands. The two courses were roughly brailed up, and then down went the helm, and the clumsy old guano-barque came slowly round and lay with backed main-topsail, head to wind. The litter which filled the small boat on chocks amidships was taken out of her, tackles were made fast, and she was hoisted over the bulwarks and dropped into the water. An accommodation ladder was dropped over the side, and three dirty ragged-looking sailors scrambled down into her. The fat apoplectic master followed more slowly and deposited his round body gingerly in the stern-sheets. Then the boat was shoved off and the three men rowed her laboriously across to us. We were well to windward, and their oars had to squeak against the thole-pins for quite half an hour before they got up to us. But they made our gangway at last, and wafted to us a good solid odour of that ever-present guano. The fat man climbed ponderously up the steps, removed his hat, wiped his scarlet face with a large red-and-yellow pocket-handkerchief, re-covered his head, and took Macadam's outstretched hand. He looked up and down and evidently wondered at the small crew there was on deck. But he made no comment on what he saw, unless a muttered "Well, blame my whiskers,"

may count as one, and evidently waited to unbosom himself till he and his old acquaintance were alone. I don't think Macadam particularly cared one way or the other, but to humour the fellow he marched him off down below, where they had their talk in private.

The three sailors, who had made their boat fast and had come uninvited up on deck, had no such scruples. They were dirty unkempt-looking men, one of them profusely bearded, the other two sporting stubbles of shorter growth, and they emitted effluvia which they seemed unconscious of. They stared curiously around and then at us, and then exchanged surprised glances with one another. Peter, who was standing near, gave vent to a harsh chuckle.

"You're English anyway," observed the bearded man.

"English as the Queen," said Peter. "We're all English batin' a couple o' jack Spaniards, an' the skipper who's a Scottie."

"Bit short-handed, aren't ye?" asked the bearded man. "Or's all hands got a watch below 'ceptin' you few?"

"There's the business part of us on deck," said Peter.

"Great thunders!" ejaculated the spokesman of the visitors, "then has all the rest o' ye got shot? We saw yer ship had had a bit o' hammerin' about, but didn't know it was as bad as that."

Whereupon the tale came out, and the three evil-smelling visitors opened their eyes with wonder.

"Well," said the bearded man, "a gewanny ship ain't a bloomin' rose-bed altogether, but there's too many thorns stuck around your berths here to suit my way o' thinkin'. I 'ope," he added turning to his mates, "our ole man won't stay palaverin' there all day." Then addressing the rest of us he explained, "We're wastin' time now, an' we ought to be makin' a passage."

"You mean," grunted Peter, "you don't like the comp'ny you're in, and you're funk'd lest one o' them blessed Chilian cruisers should 'eave into sight. Well, don't let hus keep you. The h'o-de-Clone's run out or I'd 'ave me 'ankercher to me nose now. An' as it is, we'll 'ave to swill down decks wi' kerosine when you three polecats is gone, to take the stink o' ye out o' the planks."

The fellows made no reply to this polite speech, but retreated to the head of the gangway and looked uneasily around them. Their tubby little boat was dancing and grinding away below, and they evidently wished themselves back in her and well away from the *Dodreda*.

Soon afterwards Amos Power reappeared on deck, looking hotter and more crimson than ever. The flaming cotton pocket-handkerchief was in active use, and its portly owner was talking slowly and emphatically.

"I tell you," he said as Macadam escorted him to his boat, "I'm bang certain of it. They telled me first, an' then I seed how matters was with me own eyes. You'd 'ave no chance this side. Them Chilians 'as got the whole bloomin' seaboard at their mercy, an' you'd be sure to get picked up by some o' their wessels if you tried to run in. But that rendey-voo I telled you of is all right, an' you'll be a fool if you don't try it. Blame my cats if you won't. Well, s'long. May see yer again someday." And with that he re-entered his boat and was rowed away.

"Who's trick at the wheel?" asked the captain.

"Mine," said Bathurst.

"Then sou'-sou'-west's your course."

"Sou'-sou'-west it is," repeated Walter, going into the wheel-house.

"We'll use up what steam there's left in her," continued Macadam, passing that wish down to the engine-room, "and then take her along under canvas. The wind will be fair for us. Trim sail, the watch."

CHAPTER XXI.

TRACKLESS OCEAN-WAYS.

THAT Amos Power's news had been important it was easy for anyone to see, but the exact nature of it did not transpire at once. All hands were employed

in getting the vessel under canvas, and when plain sail had been set we were divided into two watches. The names were stuck up inside the wheel-house, and the crew was apportioned as follows:—

STARBOARD WATCH.	PORT WATCH.
John Macadam, <i>Captain.</i>	Ebenezer Bygott, <i>Second Mate.</i>
Philip Carraway Cox, <i>Second Engineer.</i>	George Livrock, <i>Third Mate.</i>
Peter T., <i>Quartermaster.</i>	W. Andrew Ferguson, <i>Chief Engineer.</i>
Walter Bathurst, <i>Passenger.</i>	Tom Sturges, <i>Third Engineer.</i>
F. L'Estrange Musgrave, <i>Passenger.</i>	José Andarrez, <i>Passenger.</i>
William Edwards, <i>Steward.</i>	Manuel Hernandos.
Jones O'Connor, <i>Steward.</i>	Palmerston Smith, <i>Steward.</i>
	W. H. Brownton, <i>Steward.</i>

Bygott's watch went on duty first, and it was not till my next turn on deck that I heard the cause of our new change of direction.

The supply of coal on board was limited, and so we had to husband it for emergencies, keeping only enough steam in her to work the winches. We were bowling along our course, close-hauled, making about eight knots under the canvas alone. Save for the look-out on the fore-castle head, and Macadam, who was pacing the quarter-deck, the rest of the watch were having an easy time of it. Bathurst and I were seated on a skylight, chatting about one thing and another, when the skipper came up, and stopping in his walk, sat down alongside us.

"Bonny night," said he; "isn't it? We've neither started tack nor sheet throughout the watch; and if

the weather signs are to be believed, the wind's nailed where it is for the next twelve hours. Pretty warm too, yet. But if she reels off the knots no slower than she's doing now it won't be long before we have it cool enough to suit a Polar bear."

"Why's that?" asked Walter, somewhat mystified.

"Because we're going round the Horn."

"Round the Horn!" we both exclaimed together.

"Yes, and going to give it a precious wide berth too. Haven't you heard? Ah, no! I suppose you haven't. Well, the facts are these. I've gleaned some from Hernandos and some from old Amos Power. There have been two or three biggish fights, and as the good luck or the good management all went one way, Peruvian ships were sunk or taken in every one. The consequence is, the Chilians are complete masters of the seas at present. But Peru is doing very well on land, and has every intention of winning if she can. There are still a few war-vessels pinned up in her harbours, but they are none of them worth much, and so dare not go outside. They would most assuredly be snapped up if they did."

Macadam paused, and Bathurst asked how this affected us.

"I'm coming to that. Chili can't be beaten on land whilst she has mastery of the sea. Before the trouble

began Peru had a couple of first-class ironclads on order from England. These are now ready, and they are to rendezvous at the Falkland Islands. And so I'm just going to turn up there too."

"If you are going to rendezvous at the Falklands, why not run through Magellan's Straits?" I asked.

"Because there's a Chilian gun-boat stationed there, who couldn't possibly help grabbing us. There's another cruising off the Horn; but there's no channel there to blockade. He may keep watch over the regular track, but a hundred miles to the southward would be out of his beat, and as I shall give the land a wider berth by fifty miles even than that, there can be no chance of getting stopped. I don't like this sneaking across the common in preference to taking the high-road, but Bygott and one or two of the others have had enough of fighting, and made rather a point of it, so that I had to give way. There, I must go aft again now."

After the captain had departed out of earshot I said: "How does the propect suit you, Walter?"

"Well, as there seems no way of getting out of it," he replied, "I am going to make up my mind to like it. You see, we can't stay at the Falklands. Save for an occasional whaler, vessels seldom or never touch there; so we shall be obliged to stay where we are and ship on to another port. But I suppose we shall get back to Potter's Cove some day, and till a chance occurs of

doing it, we may as well take matters philosophically."

That's just the remark that is typical of Walter.

CHAPTER XXII.

CAPE HORN.

THE weather at sea," remarked Captain Macadam, "is, take it all round, the most variable thing in the universe. There is only one place where it is at all consistent, and where it seldom changes, and that is off Cape Horn. I've been round there eleven times now, and always in a gale. And it's very few people who can report it otherwise."

We were then in about 56° of latitude, and were driving through a blinding snow-storm under the two close-reefed topsails only.

We had been blessed with pretty good weather for the first part of the trip, but when we had made all our southing and began to bear due east, then the wind seemed to settle down to do its worst. We had been going close-hauled in half a gale for the last two days; but when we started to run, the wind hardened into a hurricane. We had got canvas off her little by little till nothing was left but a closely-reefed foretop-sail.

Mizzen-topmast and the topgallant-masts were housed, and everything sent down on deck that we could ease her of above. But she laboured terribly for all that. You see she carried her heavy guns high up, and on account of the armour the weight of her fabric was greatest above the water-line.

Noting that the fierce onset of the elements showed no present signs of abating, and fearing that if his solitary topsail were blown out of the bolt-ropes, as it momentarily threatened to do, the *Dodreda* would fall off into the trough and founder before she could be got under command again, Macadam ordered steam to be got up, and told off a batch of us for work in the stokehold. I was amongst them, and at first thought the change from the icy blast on deck to the warmth of the furnace would be a pleasant one; but I was destined to be enlightened. That was my first visit to the stokehold in a professional capacity, and the fact was instilled into me that although a thing may appear unpleasant to the casual spectator, it is quite possible that it is still more objectionable in reality. Thus it was with me. I had been down there on one errand and another more than once, and was quite alive to the fact that a stoker's duties were not always of the pleasantest. But the actual experience of them taught me a great deal more. I climbed down fathoms and fathoms of iron ladder and reported myself for duty

to the third engineer, who was stripped to shirt, trousers, and shoes. He, with a bit of a grin, told me to clear for action, which I did, and then was handed a shovel.

"Take the door amidships," said he.

"How on earth am I to stand?" I asked, looking very much askance at the heavy swaying floor of corrugated iron plates, worn smooth and shiny by constant treading.

"That," responded the third engineer, "is what a good many stokers want to find out in heavy weather. You'll fall about a bit of course. Everybody does. But you must contrive not to let coals or shovel get adrift, or they'll cascade about when she rolls, and cut up your neighbours. Look, there's that lubber Hernandos off his pins again for the third time this last half-hour. He's got the worst sea-legs of the lot. Surprising, isn't it, seeing he's been sailing all his life? There, get to work. There's no time to gossip."

Despite the draught that was always circulating—for remember, a fire is fed with oxygen as well as coal—despite the draught, I say, the air down in that awful den was almost suffocating. It reeked of baking lubricants and red-hot iron; it was heavy with coal-dust; it was sickly with the smell of bilge-water. The white, billowing flames, which cast weird black shadows whenever a furnace-door was opened, roared like so many cages full of demons.

Short-handed as we were, one had to be doubly, nay trebly, active to supply the insatiable maws with fuel, and quickly reducing my attire to trousers and shoes, which seemed the fashionable get-up down in that inferno, I found that even then the perspiration came out of me in streams.

The engines started soon after I came down, and the din was something indescribable. The rude waves were thundering for admittance outside against the plating; the furnaces roared like ravening beasts; avalanches of coal pounded about in the bunkers; men, shovels, coal, in dire confusion struggled, clattered, and stumbled about over the smooth worn floor-plates. There was no rest to be obtained, no remission of toil. With the four great engines running at even a low rate of speed, she wanted every pound of steam we could raise in her, and we toiled like so many demons.

Save for a flickering, guttering, slush-lamp or two here and there amongst the machinery, all was darkness above us. The dead-lights were all shipped, and every now and again we could hear the thunder of a torrent banging overhead as she shipped a sea. Once there was a report like the explosion of a heavy gun which rose above the general turmoil, and we guessed that it was the foretop-sail which the fury of the storm had burst from its bolt-ropes.

Pitching heavily over the mountainous waves as she

was, the twin screws were racing wildly through the air every other minute, and when the pressure of the water was taken away, and the giant machinery leaped forward with a mad bound, there was much danger of something being carried away by the constantly altering strain, and we worked on with the knowledge that if anything was carried away in the engine-room, the vessel must be overwhelmed, and whatever happened to those on deck, our fate down in the stokehold was certain.

For eight mortal hours I laboured and toiled in that iron-bound torture chamber, and then something happened which brought me respite from my toil.

How it happened I could not exactly say; all was so sudden. There was a grinding of something beneath our feet, and the motion of the vessel, which the waves imparted to her, instantly ceased. The seas no longer hammered against her iron sides. I heard the telegraphs ring rapidly round, and the pounding of the engines, which had begun to race, stopped abruptly. Then the steamer began to heel over on to her starboard side, slowly at first, but more rapidly as the angle increased. Then she toppled on to her beam-ends with a crash, and everything on the floor-plates of the stokehold cascaded to leeward in a struggling avalanche of coal, iron implements, and writhing humanity.

That the *Dodreda* was stuck hard and fast ashore we had none of us a single doubt then. Beneath us we could feel the stout iron skin bending and crumpling. How she had got there we could not tell. There was no surf pounding against her. It was only her own weight pressing against the inequalities of the ground that was making the higher projections penetrate hersheathing.

The iron floor we had been standing on recently, was now almost vertical; and the door of the furnace nearest the port side swinging open, allowed a torrent of glowing embers to shower down amongst us. There were some yells of pain as they fell on bare backs and limbs, and then a hissing as they met the water. Draining out from along the keelson, a reeking black oil-topped fluid was gravitating to the bilge where we were collected, and rose momentarily higher and higher. A cry arose, "She's sinking, every one for himself now," and we made a rush for the ladders, which were horizontal. The foremost had not gained the first landing when Ferguson stopped him.

"Steady, men, steady!" he shouted. "There is no immediate danger. Keep your heads and stay where you are till orders come from the deck. Captain Macadam hasn't forgotten that we are here, you may depend upon it, and when he wants us he'll send for us. Till then you are under my orders, and they are that

you stay where you are.—No; go back. I say, Go back.”—This last to a terrified wretch who was trying to pass him. “Confound you, get down the ladder again. Well, if you won’t, let’s see—Ah, Hernandos, you! Now, back you go, or I’ll cave your head in with this spanner.”

The man came down again, sullen, murruring, and joined the rest of us. We were standing knee-deep in coaly water, and could feel the plates giving way gradually beneath our feet. It was nervous work; but that scared Peruvian gave the example we needed, and we waited quietly and stolidly till the captain should see fit to order us on deck to snatch at a chance of saving our lives along with the others.

CHAPTER XXIII.

STRANDED.

HI! Below there!” shouted Ferguson. “You may go on deck now.”

We were on the same horizontal plane as himself, but force of habit is very strong with some people.

“You need not hurry,” the chief engineer added. “We are in no present danger.”

Partly reassured by this, we stopped to collect and put on our clothing, and then scrambled over the lad-

ders which led to the deck. Taking rather longer than my companions to get dressed, I was the last of the string, and came out into the cold to find most of them perched like a lot of disconsolate white-plumaged fowls at the weather side of the skylight. The decks were nearly perpendicular, and it was impossible to stand on them. Snow was falling thickly, being driven in an almost horizontal direction by the fierce breath of the gale which still whistled shrilly past us.

What had become of the former occupants of the deck I could not tell. Not one of them was in sight. But that was no argument that they were not close at hand, for one could not see a yard through the blinding flakes.

Where we were I could not even guess. The only thing that seemed certain to me was that we were ashore somewhere. The noise of surf coming up, as it seemed from some distance below, made itself distinctly heard; but there was no corresponding tremor of the vessel's fabric, as there certainly would have been if the heavy antarctic waves had been beating against her. So the only conclusion to draw was that the steamer's impetus had been sufficient to run her up high and dry beyond reach of the water; though, taking into account her huge and ponderous weight, this last conjecture seemed on the face of it extremely improbable. "There seems only one thing for it," I told

myself with a rather grim laugh. "An earthquake must have occurred, and an island has been thrown up from a part of the sea-bottom that she was passing over."

Full of this quaint conceit I slipped down again into cover. There was the smell of tobacco rising above the heavy oleaginous scent of the engine-room, and following it up I found Ferguson, wedged into an angle, complacently puffing at a short briar-root pipe. As he didn't seem inclined to open conversation, I favoured him, half-jestingly, with my seismic theory.

"Earthquake, your grandmother!" he retorted politely; "we're hard and fast on an iceberg."

"A what?" I gasped.

"Iceberg, iceberg.—Blast these sulphur matches, how they do make a pipe taste! It's as bad as being in France.—How we got there I don't understand, and the skipper hadn't time to explain. However, he said we should probably stay where we were for a bit, and that's good enough for me. He's in command of the ship, and will tell me when he wants to get under weigh again. I'm in charge of the engines, and they're quite enough to occupy one man's time without his bothering his head about anything else. So I'm just going to enjoy the first quiet smoke that's fallen to my lot for twenty-four hours, and then turn in where I am and enjoy a bit of sleep."

This was much too phlegmatic a notion for me just then. I was far too excited to think of remaining quietly where I was. So going out once more on deck I rejoined the rest of the stoking fraternity, who were exactly where I had left them. They were not silent, however. They were grumbling energetically at the cold, and had just decided to change their position.

"Here's a rope's-end streaming from the weather side," said one. "We can haul ourselves up by it, and work along the bulwarks forrard."

"Faith, is it a fly yez take me for?" exclaimed an Irish steward. "How can a bhoy get along them bulwarks when they're slanted like the eaves of a house? Now at the other side—"

"The lee scuppers is likely full of water," objected the first speaker.

"Sorra drop," retorted the Irishman, "or we'd hear it splashing about. Anyway, 'tis meself'll lade the forlorn hope av yez think there's any danger about it."

He worked himself round to the lower side of the skylight, and then sitting down on the decks, shot swiftly off into the obscurity.

Presently we heard his voice. "A just illegant slide, bhoys, an' a nice soft snow-dhrift to fetch up in. No chance of jerking out yer false teeth, or damaging yer watches. On yez come now!"

One by one we glissaded down, and then, seeing no

one about, made for our respective ends of the ship. I went aft. I had some trouble in getting at the companion, for it was nearly vertically overhead, and the decks were far too steep and slippery to climb. But there was a rope's-end trailing down, and up that I dragged myself hand over fist. Passing below and closing the companion after me, I went to the ward-room, where, seated in the angle of the lower walls, with their backs against the almost upright floor, I found the rest of my companions.

They were chatting calmly and coolly enough, as if, forsooth, being perched on an iceberg was an everyday occurrence, and for a moment or so it never seemed to dawn on any of them that I had been boxed up below, and was still more or less in the dark as to what had happened. However, Bathurst kindly detached himself from the group, and recounted the details of what had happened for my edification.

"The skipper was on the bridge," he said. "Peter was on the look-out forward, and I was steering. On the whole, the wheel-house was the most comfortable post of the three, although it was bitterly cold even in there. Outside, the weather was awful. We were scudding at a tolerable pace; but the snow and the spin-drift came faster and cut like whip-cord. I know that, because it was only recently that Peter and I had changed places. When we were in a snow-squall, the

night was as thick as a blanket; but in the lulls we could see around a bit. A precious wild scene it was too, I can tell you, when any of it did become visible. A tangle of the tallest waves I ever clapped eyes on, as cold and cruel-looking as grays and whites and blacks could make them; and here and there bits of ice, which did little to warm the outlook or make it more cheery. It was only small fragments I saw, pieces of floe-ice I believe they are called, none of which would measure more than fifteen or twenty feet any way. There was nothing worth swerving from our course for. Most bits we missed. Some grated and slithered along the side. One or two we caught fairly stem-on and splintered like so much glass. But, with the constant thumps the waves were dealing her, you could hardly feel the shock of these trifling collisions.

“I can tell you I wasn’t sorry when Peter came to relieve me, for we were making an uncommon wet passage of it, and it isn’t pleasant to be soused with green water every few minutes in this sort of weather. She was yawing about in the heavy sea most wildly, and it was no joke to keep her anywhere on the course. I was up to my eyes in the steering from the very first moment my hands dropped on the spokes, and had little opportunity to think of anything else. From time to time Macadam passed me down an order, which I obeyed to the best of my ability. They were

mostly instructions for negotiating some heavier sea than usual which was threatening to come on board.

"I'd been at the wheel about half an hour when the final mess-up came. You know the skipper has very fair lungs when he likes to use 'em; but I never heard a louder yell than that 'Hard a-port! Port for your life!' which was my first intimation that some desperate danger threatened us. I crammed her over all she'd go. That's the peculiar beauty of steam steering-gear. A steersman can give his full helm in a gale as easily as he can shift half a point in a flat calm. However, she evidently didn't answer quickly enough to avoid whatever was ahead. I couldn't see into the night outside, of course, for the windows of the wheel-house were all completely bunged up with snow; but I felt a shock which seemed to proceed from a blow dealt her somewhere ahead, and then another and gentler shock from somewhere below.

" 'We've collided with a big lump of ice,' thought I, 'have rammed it badly, and are now grinding over the fragments.'

"But the grating beneath quickly ceased, and so did the pitching and rolling of the vessel. She was on even keel now, and motionless as if she'd been in dock, save for the thumping of the engines below which had evidently begun to race. Then I heard them stop, and began to wonder what on earth was up. We were two

points off the course, and though I put the helm hard over, she had evidently lost steerage-way, and wouldn't answer a bit. There was the sound of heavy surf somewhere near; but there was no corresponding tremor of the vessel to show that it was pounding upon her. I was fairly gasping with astonishment and wonder.

"After a short spell of remaining motionless she began to heel over to starboard, and then, as you must know as well as I do, she toppled over with a thump on to her beam-ends, and lay motionless.

"Thrown to leeward by the shock, I stayed where I was till the captain called me, and then went outside. The air was clear again, and I could see with tolerable plainness. Above the port bulwarks nothing was in sight save the sky. At the other side an immense bluey-green mountain of ice towered away right up into the clouds."

At this point Macadam cut into the narrative.

"I was on the bridge," he said, "with my shoulders up to my ears, thinking I'd never felt so cold before, and wishing I could see a little past the fore-mast. We were in the thick of the heaviest snow-squall that it has ever been my fate to encounter. Suddenly I heard Peter's hail coming up in the teeth of the gale. I couldn't make out what he said, and knowing that he wouldn't give tongue for nothing, shouted back to that effect. He must have expected that his words

wouldn't carry, because he came running aft, bawling as he advanced, 'A great berg right ahead! Port hard!'

"I passed the word to Bathurst here, and heard the steering gear rattle in response. But it was too late. The snow drove off a bit, and I could see our stem charge the berg and split a great fragment off. It must have been loose, for it parted easily, and we surged on into the gap. Then the strangest thing happened. The great mountain of ice began to lean away from us—not hurriedly, you understand, but slowly and majestically. The piece we had sliced off had spoiled the equilibrium, and the berg was going to turn the turtle.

"Though fully alive to the fact that the surge which it kicked up might very likely swamp the *Dodreda* bodily, I could do nothing to prevent it. The helm was hard over already, and she was going at all possible speed. So I stayed quietly on the bridge and awaited developments. But for what actually did happen I'll own to it I was in no manner of wise prepared. There was a great broad tongue of ice shooting out from the berg far below the water surface and underlying us. Gradually it came in contact with our keel. The massive weight of the cruiser was as nothing to the millions of tons of the berg, and with a more powerful 'jack' than man has ever even conceived of she was

raised like a floating feather from the water and carried up into the air. Starting on an even keel, she heeled over gradually as the cradle beneath her slanted, and finally fell over, as you know, on her beam-ends.

“I think that we’re firmly fixed for a fairish spell. These big bergs don’t turn over often. But of course I can’t be answerable for the vagaries of this particular one. It may not like the new infant it has taken to nurse, and so get rid of it at the first opportunity. But still, as I say, I don’t think it’s at all likely for the present, so, bar a watch of one, all hands may as well turn in.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE GREAT BERG.

WE woke late, Bathurst and I, breakfasted leisurely, and came out on deck. The morning was bright and clear. It blew hard still, but the back of the gale was evidently broken, and the weather promised to be tolerably fair—fair, that is, for Cape Horn. Sky overhead was full of white, fleecy clouds, which scurried past to the eastward; but snow no longer fell, and the air, though keen, was dry and pleasant.

Save for a few tattered ribbons of canvas which out-

lined its bolt-ropes, and showed where the reefed fore-top-sail had been, the *Dodreda* had no evidences of the gale engraved upon her spars or upper works. Nothing had been carried away. The "gridiron" which had risen beneath her had done its work gradually and gently.

Climbing up to the port bulwarks, we found that the ledge on which we were perched was some hundred and twenty yards broad, and sloped upwards towards the sea. Its surface was hummocky, and its outer edge seemed to descend abruptly. We could not see the water-line, but we could hear the surf breaking against the cliff-foot.

The angle between the decks and the lower bulwarks was filled flush up with drifted snow, fleckless, glaring. Immediately beyond rose the main mass of the berg—a chaos of irregular crags.

Whilst we were making this very cursory inspection Macadam came up. "If you lads want to be useful, besides being ornamental," said he, "you might form yourselves into an exploring party and gain some geographical details of this piece of King Frost's territory upon which we find ourselves. I remember you saying, Bathurst, that you were at Chamounix once, and telling us something about the Mer de Glace and places of that sort, so, as you've had some previous experience, you are better equipped in that respect than any

of the rest of us. Looking at it from here there seems a remarkable scarcity of feasible routes, but a closer inspection may prove this to be wrong. Now, mind, I don't want you to break your necks in attempting the impossible, but if it can be managed I should much like an accurate survey of the berg. Thanks to the sea-schooling you've had of late, you can both use a sextant, and both know how to finger a prismatic compass. Distances you must guess as well as you can, so these two instruments will be all that are necessary. Remember, I want heights as well, heights above the water-line; but if you don't spare observations these will be easy enough to get. Don't trouble to work out your results on the spot. Just dot them down, and we'll piece the whole thing together on your return."

"What's the particular object in this survey?" I asked.

"I want to find the mass of the berg as nearly as I can, and then to make a rough guess at its centre of gravity, so that, knowing the *Dodreda's* approximate weight, we may get some idea of how she is balanced."

"The sooner we set off the better," said Bathurst. "Slip down and get the instruments, Frank, and I'll scout for a coil of rope and a couple of tomahawks¹ by way of ice-axes. Snow-spectacles, masks, and the other

¹ A small-bladed hatchet with a long handle and a spike at the back of the head.

Alpine impedimenta we must do without, as they are not forthcoming."

I got a neat little pocket sextant and a prismatic compass in a leather sling-case, and further burdening myself with a pewter flask and two tins of condensed beef, I returned to the deck. Bathurst was awaiting me with the rope and the two extempore ice-axes, and after sharing the burdens, and having no further preparations to make, we set out on our perilous trip.

The first start-off was comparatively easy. We glissaded down the decks into the soft drift which filled the lee scuppers, and then swarming down a rope gained the ice beneath. It took us less than five minutes to cross to the edge of the plateau, and there our difficulties began. Twice we traversed the foot of the steep cliffs before hitting upon a practical place of ascent; and when, despairing of finding a better, we made trial of a narrow and almost perpendicular cleft, we started with very small hopes of ever being able to gain the summit. However, by dint of cutting numberless steps with our axes, and climbing like chimney-sweeps with back and feet pressed against two perpendicular walls, and by throwing a bight of our rope over projections and hauling ourselves up to them, we gained a sort of small platform amongst the higher peaks at last, and threw ourselves down for a moment's rest, but soon started afresh.

We were making for a narrow *col* between the two highest peaks of the ice island, thinking that from these we should gain a comprehensive view of the whole. From a distance it seemed an easy enough point to attain, but those who are at all conversant with Alpine matters will readily understand that when we put it to the test the way did not turn out to be so simple. At four separate points were we foiled, and each time doggedly set ourselves to try a different route. We were beginning to get fagged, and to view that inhospitable *col* with feelings the reverse of amicable.

We threw ourselves down on some dry snow to get a minute's rest. "Climb it we must," said Bathurst. "This line of peaks runs like a saw-edge right across the berg, and at present we have got no notion of what lies on the other side. It may run down sheer to the water. It may extend for no one knows how far. Tell you what, Frank. Being cooped for such a long time on shipboard puts one in shocking bad training for a tramp."

"It does," said I, scanning the smooth ice-precipices before us with anxious eye. "But training or no training, I don't see how anyone who has not got wings or feet like a fly can ever hope to get up there."

"That's all you know about it," replied my chum merrily. "Come, get on your pins again and let's be

stirring. Days are short in these latitudes, and I don't want to spend the evening amongst these crags if it can be avoided."

On we went again, and twice more encountered impassable obstacles; but at the third attempt, being by that time rather desperate perhaps, and willing to rush at any route which promised the smallest chance of leading to the *col*, we managed to gain the coveted eminence. The only way led across a narrow *arête* which bridged a chasm, a knife-like edge ascending from chill blue depths whose bottom no human eye could plumb. In cold blood, I don't suppose either of us would have been foolhardy enough to pass it. But we were spurred now by the galling thoughts of failure. There was no other means of passing the chasm. It was that or nothing. So we decided to risk it.

Linking ourselves together with the rope, we set out on the perilous crossing. For the first few yards the edge of the *arête* was blunted, and over them we passed easily enough. But then the sides sloped away, and the sharp summit presented no foothold. With a proper ice-axe, the feat of cutting steps would have been no ordinary one; but with the shorter handled less wieldy tomahawk it appeared to me almost an impossibility. But Bathurst, who was in advance, seemed to think differently. He chopped and chopped

with the spike at the end of his weapon till a narrow foothold was obtained, and then moving forward a step splintered at the sharp ridge afresh. Meanwhile I followed up, keeping the rope taut in view of possible emergencies.

A hundred and thirty-four steps had to be cut before we got on to broader ground, for the *arête* held narrow up to the very point where it joined the *col*, and by that time Bathurst's arms, although about as muscular as arms are made, were ready to drop out of their sockets with fatigue. Stopping for rest on that razor bridge was unpleasant to think of. The wind was whistling keenly through the gully, and it was a constant muscular exertion to retain one's balance. Someone asked afterwards why we did not turn back and start afresh. The answer was simple. We couldn't. To walk backwards was impossible. To turn round would have meant to fall. Once embarked in the enterprise we were bound to see it through or—well, the alternative was grimly connected with the abysmal depths of the chasm.

However, once safely on the *col*, exertion and fatigue were forgotten in marvel at the wonderful scene which lay stretched out before us. From the manner in which it had hoisted up that ponderous cruiser we knew that the berg was a large one, but we were in no wise prepared for the colossal expanse which

stretched out beyond the range of ice-mountains which we could now see past. To the point where the waves of the Antarctic Ocean glittered and flashed against the fantastic crags straight before us, was at least a clear mile. The central part of the berg was almost level, and though hedged in by lofty cliffs on three sides, it was open on the fourth, and it was through that gap alone that we could see the water.

Wasting none of the precious time in enjoyable though profitless admiration we were soon hard at work taking observations and dotting down the results in a note-book. There was a level hundred feet on the *col*, which we paced accurately and used as a base. There was a clear horizon line, and so our angular measurements were simple. We took observations with the sextant for the altitude of all the higher peaks, got their accurate bearings with the prismatic compass, and noted that during the whole time the berg as a whole did not alter its magnetic position.

The work did not take us as long as we had expected, and at its conclusion Walter suggested a further exploration.

"Look behind you," he said. "The sun is still high above the northern horizon, and that means we have a good spell of daylight yet before us. If we gain the gap in the cliff above the sea yonder, we can get another series of cross-bearings, and then we shall have

as accurate a survey as a squad of Royal Engineers could make."

"It will be easy enough going when we are down in that valley," I observed, "but it will be awkwardish work reaching it, and slow at that. This slope before us is smooth as glass, and it would be frightfully tiring work to bend down and cut steps below one all the time. I'm afraid we shouldn't have time to get it done before dark."

"You think the upward climb would present no difficulties though?"

"Oh, that would be easy enough! We should do it in twenty minutes."

"Then, Frank, I'll take you safely down in a matter of twenty seconds. Help me split this cornice off; it's only hanging by a strip. Steady, steady, or it'll be down on your toes before you know what's happening. You're a bit too vigorous. Look out! Here it comes. Now just trim off this front edge underneath, so that it will rise at obstacles instead of crashing into them, and we shall have as good a toboggan as anyone need wish for. There, that'll do. Bear a hand now, and drag it to the brink, and then we will get aboard and be off. We'll sit well aft, the pair of us, and both steer. You take starboard, and mind don't give her too much helm at a time or we shall have her broaching-to, which would be awkward. Remember our

craft is keelless as a Thames lighter. Now, then, all snug? Away she goes. Whoop!"

Walter gave a shove off with his tomahawk, and away we shot down the decline. Our sledge, which averaged about a foot in thickness, measured about five feet by three in area, and didn't prove itself over wieldy. However, the drag of the axe-spikes in the stern kept it tolerably straight, and we flew through the frozen air at a pace that almost stopped breathing. Despite the jolting,—for our vehicle was a springless one, and the track boasted of many inequalities which were more apparent when one came to them than visible from above—despite the jolting, that rapid voyage was great fun; and I don't wonder at the Canadians, who have so many opportunities for it, being mad on the sport. From the bottom of the slope our speed began to decrease, but the momentum received during the descent was a strong one, and it carried us forward far over the plain. There were plenty of hummocks about, and it took some rather nice navigation on our part to steer clear of disaster. But a narrow shave only adds zest to the enjoyment, and our vehicle slowed up to a standstill with us still in an upright position.

We stepped off rosy, half-breathless, tingling with enjoyment, and set off straightway towards the gap which overhung the sea. The floor of the valley was

sloppy with streams and half-melted snow, but we splashed through it all pretty unconcernedly. Arrived at the point, we perched ourselves on a dry level piece of ice a dozen feet from the edge, and got to business without further delay. The two high peaks of the mid-sierra were shrouded with gauzy mist, and we could only get their altitudes approximately; but we took bearings and angles of every other eminence, and in fact got all the necessary measurements for a thorough trigonometrical survey.

Then we re-slung the instruments, pocketed the notebook, and turned our noses towards the *Dodreda* again. The steep ice-slope cost us a tedious climb, as steps had to be cut every bit of the way; but the rest of the track was far easier now that we knew it, and we got back to the cruiser a little after sunset.

CHAPTER XXV.

AFLOAT ONCE MORE.

THERE was no one on deck when we reached the *Dodreda*, but there were marks of a good deal of trampling about in the snow. There was something missing about her too, but at first, in the dark, I could not quite make out what it was. Bathurst was keener sighted. "One of the quarter boats gone," he said.

"By Jove," said I, "I hope they haven't deserted her!"

"There's a light glowing through the ward-room skylight, so there's probably someone left. However, it's a poor game to stand out here guessing in the cold. We may as well go below and see for ourselves."

So below we went, to find that we had guessed part of the truth, and whilst we were stowing away a meal we heard what had occurred from the captain's own lips.

"Yes," he said, "you were right about the boat. Bygott's got her. He's been pretty near wild with funk ever since we've been perched on this ice, and just after you left he and a following he's collected together broke out in open mutiny. They feared the berg would capsize again and swamp the vessel before she could get clear. I explained to them that I hoped to drop her off, and begged of them to wait and see; but they wouldn't listen to reason, and insisted on abandoning her at once. I'd have clapped Bygott in irons if he hadn't had more than half of the ship's company at his heels; but as Andarrez' suggestion of a bullet was a bit too summary, I was obliged to let the fellows have their way. So they provisioned the launch, fitted her carefully, lowered her into the water, and about an hour ago got under weigh. They hope to make Port Gallegos, and I suppose as a Christian

man and a kindly Scot I must hope that they may. But I must add a rider in the form of a wish that they may be punished by having a hard passage of it for leaving us short-handed at a time like this."

"Who have you left?" I asked.

"Livrock, Ferguson, Andarrez, Cox, Sturges, and Peter. However, with you two and myself added, I don't despair of success yet; and if it does come, why, all the better for us, as the plunder will have to be less subdivided. But come now, hand me over your notes and turn in. You're both dog-tired, I can see; and I can work out all the results I want from the data you have collected."

Into the blankets we scrambled without demur, slept like logs for seven restful hours, and woke to find that a scheme had cropped up for returning the *Dodreda* to her proper element again. No one monopolized the entire credit of it. The idea was evolved from the minds of all, and had been modified and improved in general discussion.

The plan was this. We were to split off a great fragment from the further end of the berg, disturb its equilibrium, and force the ice-island to restore our war-steamer to her proper element. The point of section was decided upon by the skipper and Ferguson by calculation, and we set about putting the plan into execution without further delay.

As it was quite possible that we might bring about a cataclysm which would destroy the cruiser utterly with its shock, it was necessary to reserve for ourselves some means of retreat in case of such disaster; so the first thing that was done was to fit and victual a boat capable of carrying us to one of the southern ports.

Then we set about clearing away the ice and snow which encumbered the hatches and skylights, and protecting all these and all the other weak places we could find with heavy plankings. Down below there was not much to be done. I had asked about this. Macadam had not forgotten it.

"Ferguson has been down there," said he, "chopping through the ice which has collected in the bilge, and says he thinks we are sound. Some of the plates are pretty well bent and crumpled, but he can find none that are started, and believes that all the rivets have held."

Having completed all our defences, we set about drilling the mines. This was a longer job than was anticipated, for storms which kept us from all work for days together were of constant recurrence, and more than once we found that a pit which we had laboriously delved in the ice had filled with water and was frozen up flush with the surface. But in spite of these discouragements all hands worked with a will with pick and shovel and spiked bar, tearing the

shining *debris* away, and filling the air with showers of prismatic splinters. At length the task was completed. We had sunk ten great charges of gun-cotton (once intended for torpedoes) in a line across the berg, and had connected them with electric fuses to one central point. A battery and coil were joined on to this, and the final junction was to be made by dropping a brass rod which formed the positive electrode into a cup of mercury, which was the negative pole. The brass rod was suspended by an ordinary burning time-fuse, so that when this was lit we should have plenty of time to make good our retreat before it smouldered through and unchained the gigantic forces which we had stored in the heart of the berg.

After everything had been prepared, another storm boxed us up for another couple of days; but then the weather moderated again, and we prepared to cast the die on which so much depended.

The victualled boat was lowered into the sea, and we took her round to a small natural harbour which the waves had cut from the ice at the opposite side of the berg. It was perfectly landlocked and surrounded by deep caves, into which the swells, which made their way in through the opening, boomed incessantly. We lay there for the night, riding in the middle of the little open space to lines made fast from bow and stern to hummocks on the sides; and though some of us

were perhaps too excited to sleep very soundly, all rested.

When the first cold rays of morning broke over the scene, we roused ourselves up and prepared for action. The boat was warped in to a low ice-cliff, while Macadam left us and went up and lighted the fuse. Then returning, he bade us shove out and get away without loss of another instant.

The boat regularly flew through the water, so eagerly did we put our backs into the work, and we lay-to nearly half an hour before the explosion took place. It was awful work waiting. The minutes seemed like hours. We conjured up a thousand methods by which our scheme could fail, and thought gloomily of what would be our fate if matters did go awry. I had heard of the word "suspense," but I never knew till then what it really meant.

But at last, when we were beginning to feel sure that the mine had missed fire, the charges were exploded simultaneously. The first intimation that we had of it, was the sight of a cloud of billowy smoke and ice fragments shot high into the air far above the crest of the mid-sierra. Then came a bellowing, splintering roar, and then the whole mass of the berg began to sway over towards us. But upon the white, glistening ice we looked little. Our eyes were glued on the cruiser which it cradled.

The vessel rose gently to the upright, with a heavy rain of icicles from the rigging pouring down upon closed hatch and battened skylight. As the tilt of the bed increased she began to slide down the incline, first slowly and jerkily, and then more rapidly, till at last with a tearing slide she plashed into the ocean. A great ice-mountain was overhanging her, threatening to overwhelm everything in its crashing descent. But, eased of its heavy burden, the berg hesitated in its movements for a moment or so, and that short respite proved the vessel's salvation. A heavy surge drove her bodily broadside away, and when the great towers of ice did fall she was clear of their reach. True, she was buried for the moment under the ensuing wave; but that had been calculated on, and the defences over the hatches and skylight held good, and she rose up again like a bottle, bounding almost clear of the water.

One exultant cheer went up into the frosty Antarctic air, and then we bent to our oars like madmen. As we drew near, the sea was full of fragments of floating ice, but we dodged in and out amongst it all, racing over the swells, and nearing the cruiser every second. She looked all right, but—well, we should soon know when we were once on board.

Our boat swept alongside, and up we scrambled on to the ice-littered deck and looked around us. The

Dodreda was lying in the trough of the sea, lurching heavily; and though her heavy armament, being high up, always made her roll in a seaway, we had fears lest water in the holds was adding to her unsteadiness.

We were all a bit dazed when we first got back on board, but Macadam pulled us sharply together, and despatched all hands below in various directions to find out if she was still staunch. "Go to the shaft-tunnel, Musgrave," had been my instructions; and getting a lamp from the engine-room, thither I went. It was all dry save for a small amount of ice on the bilge where she had been lying. Right away up to the stern-post I examined every joint on the starboard side, and then, turning back, examined the port. Some of the plates were slightly dented, but none were broken in.

Going back to deck with my report, I found that all the others had arrived before me, and judged by the row of pleased faces that all their tidings had been cheerful. Indeed, when I had added my testimony, a wild cheer went up, and more than one item of head-gear was flung high into the air.

"Sound as a bottle!" Macadam exclaimed delightedly. "Wouldn't that fool Bygott be savage if he knew? Well, all the larger share of prize-money per head, now that there are fewer of us to divide it. But it won't do to stand shaking hands with ourselves here

all day. Make sail, the watch. Away aloft, topmen; all of ye, that is, who can jockey a spar. Fore-topsail first. There's new canvas bent ready in place of the old that was carried away. Work with a will, lads. Heave, now. Handsomely does it. Let's have her under weigh smartly."

With the huge fore-topsail let fall and sheeted home we got her away before the wind, and then got the tackles hooked on and the boat run up to davits. By this time Ferguson, who had stayed below from the first, had given us the steam winches, so that it was not long before main-topsail and fore and main courses were all on her. The wind was light just then and she would have borne a greater press of cloth; but in view of the treacherous nature of Antarctic weather we did not show more for fear of getting caught in a sudden blow, and losing both the canvas and the spars that spread it.

"Slow and sure is our game now, lads," said Macadam. "We've got hold of the vessel again, and we'll stick to her if she'll let us, till we can hand her over to a liberal purchaser. Now then, watch off duty, get below and turn in. We shall have plenty of work on our hands again directly, for it is certain to blow before long."

CHAPTER XXVI.

SHE'S SINKING!

FOR four days all went well with us. We had one sharp blow, and were compelled to reduce sail in the midst of a blinding tearing snow-storm; but that was what might reasonably be expected off Cape Horn, and nobody was much surprised at it. Indeed, we were all distinctly cock-a-hoop at our chances of success. Even grumbling Peter was pleased to grant that we "might possibly squeak through yet if we had luck." Fortune seemed to be smiling on us very kindly. But having let us get to this condition of self-complacency the fickle jade saw fit to turn her back with cruel suddenness.

It was our watch below, and the little Peruvian general was holding forth to Bathurst and myself on our chances of distinction if we entered the naval service of his country, and was summing up the points on the tips of his fingers. He had just got to "tenthly," which was marked by the thumb of his left hand, when he was obliged to break off, for at that moment there was an energetic summons for "all hands," and we had to scurry up on deck.

It was blowing pretty fresh, and the steamer, though

never a lively vessel, was rolling very heavily. In fact it suddenly struck me that I had never known her to labour so hard before. And then the truth flashed out. There was a significant sluggishness about her movements that told me in a moment what was wrong. I had felt that kind of motion before—in the *B. James Brock*.

The captain wanted us up to do the deck work. He had sent the other watch below to make steam. Like all war-vessels, the *Dodreda* was provided with very powerful pumping apparatus, and by exerting this to its full powers Macadam hoped to keep the water under till he could make his port. It would mean a double strain on the slender crew; but that could not be helped, and the voyage did not promise to be a long one.

During a brief moment of breathing time the skipper explained to us the cause of the leak's sudden appearance. "Ice had got into all the chinks and caulked them up whilst we were on the berg," he said, "and it kept her sound for some time after she was in the water. Friction, the temperature of the sea, and the straining of the vessel, has worked this luting out; and in consequence the Antarctic seizes upon the opportunity." Then, in answer to a question, he added, "No, that's the unlucky part of it. If the mischief was only in one, it wouldn't be so bad. But

she's leaky in all her compartments, and so we have to connect the pumps with each of them."

Furnace after furnace was lit, and one after another each of the force-pumps was set agoing, till all were running at top speed. I don't know how many hundred gallons a minute they returned into the Antarctic alongside, but the figure was a very large one.

For some time it seemed as though our efforts would be successful. The water-level in the sounding-well ebbed by rapid inches. The thirst of those great direct-acting pumps was greater than the leaking joints in the plating could satisfy. And we began to congratulate ourselves accordingly. The captain was so confident that he began to make plans as to what must be done at the Falklands to get at the leaks, and was gravely discussing with Andarrez the likelihood of being able to acquire the services of men on the ships at the rendezvous, who were at the same time divers and mechanics, and was turning over other questions of a like nature. But as the days wore on, this sort of conversation gradually died away; and the captain's forehead heaped itself up into wrinkles, and the captain's fingers frequently tugged viciously at his beard. And the spirits of all hands ebbed in similar fashion.

The reason was not far to seek. The water in the holds had not yielded as it promised at first. The pace of diminution slowed down as it progressed, slowed

by gradual but perceptible and always increasing degrees, till at last the level was stationary, and that with the pumps pounding up and down as hard as a full head of steam could drive them. There was small doubt of what would happen now. The flood-tide came up irresistibly, and we could do nothing more to check it. The *Dodreda* was fitted with a brace of hand-pumps, but we did not weary ourselves needlessly by manning the breaks. One might as well have attempted to bale out the Thames at Mortlake with a tea-cup, as to influence her leakage by their puny powers.

We were in a sinking ship, far away in the world's most desolate ocean!

The situation was a perilous one. And yet I believe that we had on board a man who very nearly enjoyed it. Peter, the cross-grained, walnut-faced sailor, had foreboded evil on the day of the launch, because we had found on regaining the deck a Mother Carey's chicken lying there warm and dead, killed by a falling fragment of ice. Peter said it was an omen. Macadam called him a croaking fool; and now the queer old fellow was able to go about scattering "I-told-you-so's" to everyone he came across. The pleasure it gave him even caused him to smile at times, and it took much to excite his risible faculties. However, the rest of us were glum enough, and I heard the second engineer confiding to Ferguson that there were worse fixes than

being cooped up in a Chilian prison-hulk. But as that sage Scot remarked, "it was just as easy and just as useful to sigh for Holyrood Palace. What we had got to do was to make the best of present circumstances."

When the water began to gain on us afresh, the war-ship's fate was inevitable, and her end was only a question of hours; so Macadam hauled his wind and stood for inshore. By his last observation we were a hundred and thirty-five miles off the nearest land, and that same land was one of the islands near the bleak, bare Cape of Storms. As the gain of the leak was steady, we could calculate the time it would take before the fires were dowsed, and knew that we could not hope to sight the land, much less beach the steamer, even if we had wanted to. We must trust to the boat. But the captain judged that the nearer a small craft was to the inhospitable shore, the more chance of reaching it her occupants would have.

The boat upon which we were to rely was the one which we had had in the water before. The cargo with which it had been previously burdened was fetched up again from below, and once more stowed on board, with certain additions, and under Peter's careful eye all the tackle and gear received a careful overhaul. You may be sure that nothing was neglected. One works carefully on occasions like these, for forgetting a trifle may be signing your own death-warrant.

Whilst this work was going on, the rolling of the *Dodreda* had been getting heavier and heavier; and soon after its completion the pounding of the steam-pumps grew rapidly fainter, and finally stopped altogether. That meant that the water had reached the furnace bars, and the fires were out for the last time. It also told us that the many feet of water in the hold would begin to increase at quadruple pace forthwith. The half-drowned stokers came on deck, putting on their clothes as they got there, and the order was given for all hands to take to the boat.

Lowering the little craft whereon our last hope of safety depended was no easy matter under the circumstances, for the cruiser was by this time dipping her rails alternately, and letting huge billows of green water course madly across her decks. The odds on the boat getting stove-in seemed fearsomely heavy. But of a sudden the davit-tackles creaked out, the hooks were cast off, and the boat was riding out over the billows at the end of six fathoms of three-inch warp, with Peter and Livrock ready to fend off when she showed signs of hammering against the steamer's white sides again.

A whip was rove to the main yard-arm, and one by one we were transhipped—a process, let me tell you, which was not completed in a minute. Macadam was the last man to leave the ship, and he reported that

water was over the cabin floor when he quitted her. She could not have many more minutes to swim.

The neighbourhood was dangerous; and not wishing to be sucked down as she foundered, we got out oars as soon as our commanding officer had joined us, and pulled away to a safe distance. There we lay-to, paddling gently to keep head to sea, watching for the end, and feeling very mournful and dispirited. It was like sitting by the death-bed of one's best protector.

But we had not long to wait. The war-vessel was hove-to under backed main-topsail, and so our rates of drift were equal. For a while she rolled more and more, often sending her yard-arms into the water, and pitched till the waves swept unchecked over her bow, and played havoc with the deck fittings. Then she seemed to settle down heavily and steadily on an even keel. A moment afterwards the poop-deck blew up with a dull report, her sharp steel ran heaved up into full sight, and she began to sink by the stern. The decks were forced up piecemeal, and when the hull was once under water she righted again and sank more steadily. Shivering as they were drawn down, top-sails disappeared, and then the waves splashed at the trucks at her mast-heads, and a moment afterwards she had quitted human view until the seas drain dry.

There had been a mournful silence in the boat whilst the *Dodreida* was actually foundering; but as

soon as the last of her had disappeared the lusty voice of the captain made itself heard, bidding us step the masts and get the boat under canvas without further delay.

“We’ve a long cruise ahead of us, lads,” said he, “and moon-gazing here at the bare Antarctic doesn’t decrease the distance.”

Half an hour later we were bowling briskly along to the E.N.E., with a single reef down in the two lugs, and their sheets almost free. There was a heavy sea running, but Macadam was a careful helmsman, and drove the boat dryly over it. The rest of us were altering the stowage of the cargo somewhat to get her in slightly better trim.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE ISAAC AND AILEEN.

OPEN-BOAT sailing off Cape Horn is not an occupation to be coveted at any time; but the hardships we had been enduring of late were so heavy that it was difficult to conceive of greater depths of misery and discomfort. And so at first the change from cruiser to quarter-boat seemed almost a change for the better. The need for the constant toil, toil, toil was removed; a watch of two could do all that was required, and I

know that most of us put in a lot of arrears of sleep, albeit the semi-liquid slush that was constantly squirting up through the floor gratings was not the most comfortable of bed companions.

But after we had been knocking about in that frail boat for a fortnight, our spirits were down at a very low ebb. Being in the track of ships we had sighted some dozen vessels, but none of them either did or would notice us. And whenever we attempted to make up for any of the few harbours on that inhospitable coast, we were always ruthlessly driven off again and forced to keep to sea. Throughout the whole time, we had been fighting our way through fierce gales and bitter snow-storms. Cape Horn weather was in its most malignant mood. The sun never deigned to show his face at all. Driving clouds always ceiled the sky close above our heads.

Through the constant strain of the heavy seas our boat began to leak badly, and it was always one hand's business to bale overboard the semi-congealed slush with which she was constantly being filled. Spray was continually driving over her, and oilskins were of no avail. We were shivering with wet day in day out, and at night our clothes were crisp with ice.

Ferguson suffered agonies from rheumatism; Livrock's feet were frost-bitten; Bathurst had a badly ulcerated throat which almost prevented his swallow-

ing and made him very weak ; while the rest of us were all in a very bad way with severe colds and one thing and another. Even brine-seasoned old Peter had not escaped. He had lost his voice, and every now and then was seized with violent cramps. Our outlook was a gloomy one. It seemed as though we should none of us live to see land again.

But after the close of that fortnight relief came to us in the form of a three-masted schooner, which surged past us in a whirlwind of snow-wreaths, but noticed our signals. She was close-hauled and so they could easily heave her to, and what was more to the point they did it. Even then we were by no means safe. A tremendous sea was running, huge gray and green rollers that skied us high above her decks one minute and hove the schooner up the next, as though she was about to be dropped bodily down a-top of us ; and however skilful Macadam might be, there seemed but little probability of our being able to get on board. It was a case of the brazen pitcher and earthen bowl floating in the same stream. Still, you may be sure that none of us were unwilling to risk it. If Scylla is as bad as bad can be, Charybdis cannot possibly be worse. So we dowsed all sail and got out oars and pulled cautiously across the intervening rollers.

The schooner's bulwarks were lined with curious faces as we approached, and presently we noted men

getting into the rigging with coils of small line to give us every aid in their power.

Nearer and nearer we drew, the schooner riding head-to-wind, sawing over the waves, and outlining herself with a white shoal of foam. At last a snaky coil of rope flew out, which Bathurst, who was rowing bow-oar, cleverly caught and made fast to our painter. In another minute we had swung in and the boat's gunwale had been forced with a splintering crash against the schooner's strong black sides. As she rose on a wave we all jumped with one accord, landing on the stranger's deck and leaving the swamped boat to disappear in about half a minute. All in her was lost. We could not save a single thing. The constant straining had weakened her fabric, and the concussion when we came alongside did the rest. Her bows ceased to rise to the sea the moment we left her.

"That's a mighty close thing," observed the captain of the schooner. "I've seen men drowned out of a smaller fix. However, now you have scraped clear, I daresay you'd like to make it eight bells and then turn in a spell. You're none of you much to boast of in the way of condition just now. Steward! Cocktails!"

Down we went, had the cocktails—my eye, weren't they good!—and some food, and then turned in, nothing loath. It seemed a paradise of luxury after what we had gone through.

When we woke up again, we learnt we were aboard of the *Isaac and Aileen*, whaling schooner, sixteen months out of New Orleans. She was a smart powerful craft of four hundred tons burden, and possessed of all the best appliances for the fishing that science and modern ingenuity could invent, from cannon-harpoons to explosive lances.

She was not at the end of her commission; and as fishing had not been over successful, her master could not waste time by putting us ashore at any civilized port. He said, however, that he would be very glad to keep us on board, as he had plenty of provisions and water, but hoped that we would make ourselves useful as he was rather short of hands. One of his boats had been upset by a sounding whale's flukes, and his second mate and five men were drowned. Of course we said we would help; and so, smart Yankee that he was, the worthy skipper managed to kill two birds with one stone. Whilst fulfilling a mariner's duties of humanity, he had also contrived to fill his empty berths at a cheapish rate.

Macadam went aft and assumed the drowned mate's duties and position. The rest of us, engineers and all, were berthed forward, and were rated as deck-hands, and worked as such. Life aboard the *Isaac and Aileen* was pretty hard and dreary. When we came across her the schooner was making her way towards

a fresh fishing ground in the South Pacific, but it was a month and a half before we reached it, most of that time being spent in ratching backwards and forwards off that detestable Cape of Storms. No sooner did we log off a hundred miles to the good than down would come another storm and force us to heave the schooner to head to wind. And then when the weather moderated a little we found our driftage had covered almost all the ground previously gained. And so we made board after board, twelve hours each way, till at last a slant of wind enabled us to go a bit freer and slip round into the other ocean. And this, mind you, was in a schooner. In a square-rigged vessel we might well have been twice as long.

Our fishing was almost uniformly unsuccessful, and though all hands, both forward and aft, grumbled most energetically, that didn't seem to better it in the least. The much-wished-for "There she spouts!" only came from the crow's nest at the foremast-head four times whilst we were on board, and on two of these occasions the school of whales had escaped before we could come up with them. In fact, we only picked up three fish in all, and those were miserably small ones. But as we had neither of us a pecuniary interest in the cruise this did not give Bathurst and myself much cause for regret. From what little we did see of the operations of "cutting up" and "trying out," we decided

that they were mysteries into which we had no wish to be further initiated. The crew, however, had no such dainty objections. They were paid by shares, and so to them the savour of whale-oil making was a sweet savour, to miss which was a source of chronic annoyance and grumpiness. They were spending their lives, working hard, and laying nothing up to spend or hoard at the end of the cruise.

So it may be readily judged that amiable tempers were not the rule aboard the *Isaac and Aileen*. Her people were as uncouth a lot as one could meet with anywhere, and in their ruffled state their sayings and doings were something too awful to recount. Mind, I do not wish to complain, to say that we were badly treated, because on the whole we were not. Only in an atmosphere which is redolent of ill-temper no one comes off scot-free. As Bathurst said once, "It was as if we had been chucked into a barrel full of tame bears. They didn't any of them want to hurt us, but every now and then first one and then another would give us a roughish hug, just because we happened to be there and handy."

At last the prevailing discontent of the crew culminated in something very nearly approaching mutiny. Unimaginative Yankees though they were, with but few exceptions, they got a notion into their heads that the schooner was under an unlucky spell, and nothing

would remove it. The ocean was barren for the *Isaac and Aileen*, and always would be barren, and it was useless quartering it any longer.

We Dodredas stayed aloof from the argument, for though we were sick enough of staying out there we didn't like to interfere. But the forecabin was quite strong enough without us. First a carefully couched round-robin was drawn up, signed, and handed aft, and the result awaited for a couple of days. But as a steward reported that the skipper had used their precious document for cigar lights, a capstan-head council was formed, and then the hands went aft and flatly refused further duty unless the schooner's bows were turned eastward forthwith. That settled it. Indeed, I believe the captain was very glad to have the decision made for him instead of being compelled to do it himself; for although he talked very big, and threatened to hand all his crew over to the authorities at the first port he touched at and have them tried as mutineers, he was very cheerful over giving orders to put down the helm and ease off all sheets; and as he turned to go below there was a pleased look on his sallow face.

Our passage eastward was a quick one. The wind blew "right hard and Hornily," but as it blew always in the right direction, and never too hard for us to run before it, we hauled in the knots at the average of over two hundred per day.

"There seems," I had said to Walter, "a considerable likelihood of our Vanderdecken existence being put an end to at last."

"Don't you be too sure," had been his reply, and when we commenced to make our northing it appeared as if his words were going to come true. Adverse winds and calms alternated with one another in irritating succession, till it seemed as though the *Isaac and Aileen* was doomed to keep the seas till she rotted from sheer old age.

But the dreary voyage brought itself to an end at last, at least so far as we were concerned, for a brisk slant of wind came from the N.N.E., and the captain ran into the river Plate and put us ashore at Monte Video. He said he did it to accommodate us. We rather thought it was to save his provisions from further inroads, as he had plenty of hands left to carry the schooner home. But we said nothing about that, and thanking him for all he had done for us, parted the best of friends imaginable.

My word, how queer the land did feel at first! It was two years since any of us had known the feel of solid earth, and after all that dreary time spent on a heaving ship's deck, you have no idea how strange and unyielding dry ground does feel once more. It was perfectly impossible to walk straight at first. There seemed a something wanting. Indeed, I believe

that nothing short of an earthquake would have made us feel at home at first.

But about these little niceties we had little time to think. We were strangers in a strange country, and had to look about us forthwith for temporary billets, as none of us possessed a dollar, and the captain of the *Isaac and Aileen* had sailed off promptly after dropping us, for fear lest any of his men should desert. However, the English consul was very kind, and on learning that we were shipwrecked mariners—we withheld details—kindly advanced enough money for a telegram, and gave the whole lot of us an order for a couple of days' board and keep at a small sailor's *fonda*.

That was the first step. Then came the next.

The cable flashed the message of our being still alive across the Atlantic to Tring and Potter's Cove, and in a day's time congratulations came back, and a credit was opened to our account at a Monte Video bank, which helped us in some small degree to return past kindnesses.

But only Macadam would return with us to England. The others said that they had had enough of seafaring for the time being, and that they were going to stay behind, for a while at any rate, to try their luck in the Argentine Republic. Men were wanted, and they were all sure enough of snug places

Indeed, we left them all in good berths, and I heard from Livrock the other day that he had married and felt like settling down for good. He was a ship's chandler in a largish way of business, and who should he have got for a partner but cross-grained old Peter. Peter, by the way, was married too, and the whilom third mate added, with sly malice, that the crusty old chap had altered considerably. His wife was a tartar, and preferred to do all the necessary grumbling of the establishment herself; and when Peter ventured to put in his spoke she was wont to throw the kettle at him.

Of Bygott and his boat's crew we never heard again; but it does not follow that they came to grief. The erstwhile second mate of the *Lynx* was so scared about his connection with the captured Chilian war-vessel, that wherever he landed he would certainly disclaim all knowledge of her; and I should think the odds are quite in favour of his being safe somewhere, and I should not be in the least surprised at meeting him again. One is constantly coming across some old acquaintance one does not in the least expect.

For instance, who should suddenly turn up the other morning at my Cambridge rooms but Macadam. I had heard of and from him frequently. He had proved an exception to the rule that "a captain who loses his ship is never intrusted with another," and was in command of one of the fleetest greyhounds on the Atlan-

tic. We chatted for awhile, and then Bathurst came in from across the court, and together we yarned over the whole of what we'd seen together, from start to finish. When all the reminiscences had come to an end, I ventured to remark that we'd had a most abominably rough time of it. Whereupon they both vehemently rose against me and vowed that they wouldn't have missed those two years they were kept away from land for anything. But when I inquired if they would care to have them repeated, I was told not to ask inconvenient questions.

THE END.



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